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Centenary 1861-1961

RABINDRANATH  
TAGORE

ON ART & AESTHETICS

A Selection of Lectures, Essays and Letters

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Edited by  
**Prithwish Neogy**

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## P R E F A C E

A genius is a universal man, and placed in his time and province, Tagore had to make the great bridge between two centuries and two cultures. The world commemorates how successfully he achieved this in this centenary year of his birth.

To Tagore art was not the stuff of craft or dialectics: it was the conscience of man credited as vision. All art was one to Tagore as vision meant perspective, relationship, rhythm. He essays, as such, many forms of art and made them one in his person. He explored music and dance, as he did poetry and literature, and the range of journalism.

This little volume, "Tagore on Aesthetics", compiled and edited by Sri Prithwish Neogy, is a measure of the Poet's estimation of painting, its province and its principle. The essays are not academic in character or in scope. They are intimate confessions, casual, roving, and because they are so, they are suffused with the style of the poet. They are the better for wanting the dry precision of the professional critic.

The best of these essays throw light on what art meant to Tagore. They tell of how painting and drawing brought in a kind of light which is other than the light of reason. Arranged almost in chronological order, and translated by two distinguished Tagore scholars, the original freshness has been preserved and Tagore's points have been put across precisely and with little sacrifice of the original Bengali.

The association of the Inter-National Cultural Centre, New Delhi, as a sponsor and publisher of this volume was inevitable. It is the Tagore Centenary Year. The Centre, a non-official organization, is closely and integrally associated with the contemporary art movement in India. It surveyed the field of Tagore publishing and specially elected to institute this volume of Tagore essays on the art of painting. Its purpose was to supplement the growing recognition of Tagore as a great expressionist painter with Tagore's best thoughts on painting. The result is this volume.

The publishers would have liked to include more plates; but as the book is designed to reach far and deep, a selection had to be made. The publishers take this opportunity to thank all those who cooperated in this venture.

INTER-NATIONAL CULTURAL CENTRE

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OUR sages enjoin a preparatory stage of stern discipline. Many will contend that a life of hardship is all very well for producing a saintly character—impervious to natural affections and desires. But, how about the arts and the letters? How can we overlook cultivating the sense of beauty if we wish to have a complete man? Quite true, Beauty there must be. Not self-immolation, but self-expression must be our aim. But it is wrong to suppose that to cultivate discipline is to cultivate aridity. The peasant does not tend his fields to make of it a desert. When he ploughs the land, harrows the clods, and rakes the ground free of weeds, it may look as if he is doing violence to the field. But that is how he makes his land yield the fruits of his labour. Similarly, in proper appreciation of beauty an initial cultivation of discipline is a must. The path to beauty is strewn about with delusions. One who aspires after the fullness of life, must needs train himself to overcome these obstacles, even at the cost of some initial hardship.

Unfortunately for man, he often lets the end be overshadowed by the means. Thus, a would be singer merely acquires vocal skill, a potential man of wealth ends up by being a pitiable miser and a prospective patriot considers himself fortunate if he is able to pass a few resolutions. Similarly, we notice that

discipline, which is only a means, often supplants the ultimate end. People start hankering after it for its own sake, with an avidity of passion which we generally associate with the lower propensities. Meaningless self-flagellation comes to be glorified to an extent that people start estimating this gain in terms of privation endured. The hard bed makes way for a blanket spread on the floor and thereafter that too is dispensed with. And so self-denial ends up in a suicidal craze. This is like making a fetish of repression until we indulge in it, like strangling oneself by trying to tear away the noose. No doubt, a passion for austerity can effectually squeeze out the aesthetic sense to a last drop. But, if we can properly regulate our pursuit of discipline, having fullness of life in view, we need not do violence to any one human faculty at the cost of the others. Rather would they strengthen each other in the process.

The fact is that the foundation must be strong to be able to support a superstructure. That which upholds or gives shape must be firm. However soft and supple the flesh might be, if it were not laid on the rigid frame of bones it would be a shapeless lump. Likewise, joy and wisdom must needs have a firm basis, else wisdom would end in fantasy and joy in delirious drunkenness. This foundation is the discipline of restraint which is strong enough to discriminate and discard. Like the gods, it sustains on the one hand and destroys on the other, firm alike in making and unmaking. If beauty is to be enjoyed to the uttermost, restraint is essential. Unrestrained imagination cannot hope to create beauty in the same way as one does not set the house on fire to light the lamp. The fire must be kept in check so that it may illumine. The same holds good with our desires and passions. Allow these to flare up unrestrained, and they will burn to ashes that which they would rather irradiate.

It is true whenever our desires and passions sit down to feast, nature garnishes the table with beautiful things. The fruit does

not merely appease hunger, it delights the senses with form and odour, colour and taste. Had it lacked all these good points the hungry would eat it. But no nature would treat us to a feast of beauty in the very process of meeting our barest needs. Dire need or want humiliates our humanity. The touch of beauty heals our hurts. It is because of the higher tone that beauty gives to the appeasement of our hunger that the beast which knew no law beyond the urge of his senses has become today amenable to the law of love, has become human. Beauty has brought our instinctive urges under control. We are no more slaves of dire necessity because the joy of beauty is there to liberate us.

It may be seen, therefore, that ultimately beauty makes for restraint. One who rebels against the idea of controlling passion because they are bad, would readily discard them because they are ugly. As beauty draws us gently towards what is comely, what is restrained, so does discipline deepen our enjoyment of beauty. If the honey bee does not have poise as it sits on the flower, it cannot suck the honey out of its core. Only the devotee knows what true beauty is and not one who hankers after it greedily. The covetous can never become a connoisseur of good food.

I do not say this by way of preaching a moral homily, my standpoint is that of aesthetics. It is absurd to suggest that beauty may be created out of weakness or instability of character, out of a lack of restraint. A real artist must be a seeker, an ascetic. He cannot afford to be capricious. My contention is that whenever we build up something of abiding value, the binding force comes from some inner strength and not through any aberration. In creating important works of art, artists have proved the strength of their character, whereas in dissipating their talents they have shown us their weakness by succumbing to passion and proving false to their own ideal of beauty. Our unchecked passions tend to create a world of

their own, out of harmony with the world around. Our anger, our greed, bring about such distortion that the great becomes small and the small great; the ephemeral appears to be eternal and the eternal eludes our vision. The falsity we lust after is magnified to such an extent that it obscures for us the light of the great truths, and thus do our creations come into conflict with what Providence has created. Some profess to see a kind of beauty in this frenzy. I have felt at times that the literature of Europe has taken a special delight in this type of suicidal orgy—aimless, purposeless and at war with itself. We cannot call this a perfection of culture, we can only look upon it as an aberration.

The connoisseur does not permit himself to be overcome by a loud display of colours. He looks for a harmonious whole taking the principal with the subsidiary, the central with the marginal, the foreground with the background. The colourful may captivate the eye, but the beauty of harmony calls for understanding. The deeper the mind penetrates the deeper the joy of understanding. Probably for this reason, many artists do not care for frills, their classic dignity admits of no ornamentation. Consequently there is a severity about their creation which the ignorant find much too bare for their taste. It is this very austerity, however, which fills the heart of cognoscenti with a profound joy, thus, it may be seen that mere eyesight is not enough, it must be reinforced by the insight of the mind in order that Beauty may lie revealed in its nobility. One must have training to develop the insight.

The mind, again, has many levels. The field of vision which is open to our reasoning and intellectual faculties becomes widened when emotions are brought into play. With moral discrimination added to them, the field is widened farther. And once our spiritual insight lies open, infinitude becomes the limit. That which we see with our mind's eye, gives us more satisfaction. The human face attracts us more than a pretty

flower. In addition to the harmony of form and features, the face displays the light of consciousness, a play of intelligence and a grace of emotional expression, which make a simultaneous impact on our sense-perceptions, our intellect and our emotions. Such an appeal cannot get easily exhausted. That is why men have celebrated in poetry and painting the nobility and beauty of renunciations of the prince who forsook the throne to deliver his fellow men from the thralldom of sorrow.

There you are again, the critic carps, confounding aesthetics with ethics. Why mix up the two? What is good is good, what is beautiful is beautiful. The two terms connote different concepts because their appeal and impact are different. That which is good pleases us because it fulfills some need, but the reason why beauty makes such an appeal to us is something more than what we can fathom.

The Good, I repeat, is beautiful not merely because of the good it does to us. There is something more to it. What is good is in consonance with creation as a whole and therefore also with the world of men. Whenever we see the Good and the True in perfect accord, the Beautiful stands revealed. Pity is beautiful, forgiveness is beautiful, love is beautiful. Like the full-blown lotus, or the full moon, they are integrated in themselves and with the rest of the world. Lakshmi of our legends represents not only wealth and beauty, but goodness also. Beauty is Good in its fullness as fullness of Beauty is Good incarnate. Beauty transcends necessity, wherefore we regard it as opulence or as a power which liberates us into love out of penury of self-seeking. Whenever we see a hero sacrificing his self-interest or laying down his life for a great cause, we come face to face with a tremendous phenomenon—something which makes our own little joys and sorrows, our selfish concerns and our day to day existence, inconsequential. Like Beauty, Goodness too leads us towards renunciation.

Beauty reveals God's majesty in the midst of His creation.



Goodness does the same in the conduct of human living. Goodness shows beauty not so much as a thing to be perceived or understood. The beauty of goodness is a thing of much wider and deeper significance—it endows man with Godliness. It is because of its intimate nearness that we do not always notice goodness as beauty. When we do realise this, our whole being overflows with happiness like a river in flood, we come to know then that nothing in the world can be more beautiful.

Our ancient poets did not fight shy of dwelling on the beauties of a pregnant woman—a subject that would make his European compeer blush with shame. True, radiance of expectant motherhood has little to beguile the eye. But the imminence of the highest fulfilment of a woman's womanhood, invests the expectant mother with an aura of holiness, of purity, which claims its tribute of respect far above the mere enjoyment of physical charm. The fleecy likeness of the autumn cloud lit up by the departing sun may dazzle the eye. The monsoon cloud, ponderous with its promise of life-giving showers, may not look half as spectacular. But in its dark stillness it carries with it the bounty for the parched up soil. Wherever beauty attains perfection it discards all superfluity. The flower eschews its surplus of colour and aroma to achieve the richer sweetness of fruition wherein Beauty and Goodness become one. Whoever has penetrated into the mystery of this union, can never again confound Beauty with luxury. Life for such a one becomes simple and plain not because he lacks a sense of beauty, but because he cultivates this sense to its highest perfection.

In India we find temples and other works of art tucked away in inaccessible regions—on the top of some hills or on some lonely stretch of seashore. But, how about the stately pleasure domes of royal revelery? Their relics are nowhere to be seen. Why is it that the kings raised such beautiful monuments in out of the way places, away from towns and

capitals? It is because they felt moved to pay their homage of awe and reverence to something greater than they, through their own handiwork. These shrines of beauty are like worshippers with their arms uplifted in adoration of something that is still more beautiful. In this way all that is great in man prostrates itself to that which is still greater.

In the union of the Good and the Beautiful, of Vishnu and Lakshmi, is true perfection. This is the underlying idea of all cultural patterns. The day will surely come when beauty will no more be bound by self-seeking or injured by malice or ravaged by greed. Beauty can never be truly realized in all its purity unless it is viewed apart from our sensual desires. Our incomplete understanding of it arising out of a lack of poise and restraint whets our thirst but does not give us any satisfaction.

When sense organs regulate our sense of beauty, there is bound to be a sharp contrast between what does and what does not appear to be beautiful. When sense is reinforced by sensibility, the distinction ceases to be so pronounced; then our mind may feel attracted by something which may not please the eye at first sight. When we discover a subtle harmony between the prologue and the epilogue, the primary and the secondary, the part and the whole, and the discovery of this relationship gives us joy, we no longer remain slaves of external appearance. Further, when our moral sense joins hands, the horizon of our mind extends to an extent where the conflicting notions of beauty and non-beauty fade away.

How about the sense of Goodness? Does it not juxtapose the two conflicting notions of the good and the bad? Now if these ran on parallel lines—they can neither meet nor proceed *ad infinitum*. They must come to an end, and this end can be one in the same way as there is one sea in which the river flowing between its two banks empties itself. The current pre-supposes the opposite; its cessation their reconciliation. When a piece

of wood is rubbed against another, there is fire. Once the fire flares up, further friction becomes unnecessary. Similarly, when our sense of beauty, sparking out at every conflict of the pleasurable and the painful, the good and the bad, finally bursts into flame—all the contrast of separateness becomes consumed in it. What happens then? Then Truth and Beauty become one. Then we perceive that in the realization of Truth there is joy and the quintessence of beauty.

Where in this world of fleeting forms do we have a taste of the True. Wherever our mind can find its repose. Men of the street come and go, we perceive but feebly—like shadows, we cannot take our joy of them. But the truth of a friend is an intimate truth, it gives our ideas and thoughts a support and to the extent that a friend is true for us he gives us joy. The foreign country which is only a geographical name to me, is so real to those who belong to it that they are ready to lay down their lives for it. So we see wherever the True is fully revealed to us, there is joy. Absence of joy is only inadequate realisation of the True. Similarly, when we fail to take our joy of the True, we only know it but we do not feel it to be our own. Where the true is indubitably true to me, it is like love, it is like joy. Understood in this way, the realization of Truth and the realization of Beauty become one and the same thing.

All our literature, all our music and fine arts are tending towards the True, whether consciously or unconsciously; all of them seem to try to bring the True into prominent focus. That which was untrue to us because it was unperceived so far, the poet brings within our range of vision. In this way the extent of our joy of the True is becoming wider, vaster. Our literature is putting the hall-mark of artistic beauty on all that appeared to be petty and went unnoticed, it makes a friend of a mere acquaintance and a thing of beauty out of every visible object. The poet has said : Beauty is truth, truth beauty.

The Upanishads too tell us: *Anandarupamamrtam yadvibhati*, all that is, is manifestation of His joy, His deathlessness. From the speck of dust at our feet to the stars in the heavens—all is a manifestation of truth and beauty, of joy and immortality.

Arts and literature seek to realise and communicate this essential joy and everlastingness of the True. Mere perceptual or intellectual grasp of the True does not, however, by itself set the creative impulse in motion. The emotions must be brought into play. Even that is not all or enough, if the creative technique is wanting. What are literature, music or fine arts? They are all media of artistic self-expression through the language of the word, the sound, the line and the colour. And all of them seek to record but one thing—the wonder and joy of man's discovery of the True. Thus were the Pyramids placed as notes of admiration of man for the vast expanses of the desert sands; the caves of Elephanta, carved with such artistic care, signify man's joy for the beach of a lonely island by the sea; the temple of Konarak, raised with huge blocks of stone carried from long distances, symbolize man's salutation for the glory of the sun rising out of the sea. Thus, wherever man has had a profound realization of the True as a source of joy abiding, he has put up a sign in sculpture, in temples, in places of pilgrimage, in capital cities. Literature, too, is such a symbol; it puts up sign-posts of beauty to mark out in the language of words, all those landing places along the banks of the fleeting world whereon man's mind may dwell on the face of beauty which is truth. These symbols, these calls to beauty are widespread in time and space in the records man has left of his reactions to Nature and Seasons, of his aspirations as concretized in his Religion and History. We can hardly imagine how narrow our world would have been for us, but for these sign-posts marking on either side of our road to progress, these discoveries of Truth—discoveries that have transformed the

objective world of our perception into a subjective world of feelings and emotion.

That the True is determined by the interaction of the static and dynamic in Matter, that events are connected to one another by factors of Space and Time, Cause and Effect—this is what our physical sciences tell us. Art and Literature bring home to us that what is True is Joy, what is True is Eternal. They annotate over and over again the truth propounded by the Upanishads:

*Raso vai sah. Rasam hi evāyam  
lavdhvānandī bhavati....*

He is Truth in all its Beauty and to realise Him is to taste Joy everlasting.

Translated by Kshitish Roy from the Bengali essay 'Saundaryabodh'.

WE are face to face with this great world and our relations to it are manifold. One of these is the necessity we have to live, to till the soil, to gather food, to clothe ourselves, to get materials from nature. We are always making things that will satisfy our need, and we come in touch with Nature in our efforts to meet these needs. Thus we are always in touch with this great world through hunger and thirst and all our physical needs.

Then we have our mind; and mind seeks its own food. Mind has its necessity also. It must find out reason in things. It is faced with a multiplicity of facts, and is bewildered when it cannot find one unifying principle which simplifies the heterogeneity of things. Man's constitution is such that he must not only find facts, but also some laws which will lighten the burden of mere number and quantity.

There is yet another man in me, not the physical, but the personal man; which has its likes and dislikes and wants to find something to fulfil its needs of love. This personal man is found in the region where we are free from all necessity,—above the needs, both of body and mind,—above the expedient and useful. It is the highest in man, this personal man. And it has personal relations of its own with the great world, and comes to it for something to satisfy personality.

The world of science is not a world of reality, it is an abstract world of force. We can use it by the help of our intellect but cannot realize it by the help of our personality. It is like a swarm of mechanics who though producing things for ourselves as personal beings, are mere shadows to us.

But there is another world which is real to us. We see it, feel it; we deal with it with all our emotions. Its mystery is endless because we cannot analyse it or measure it. We can but say, "Here you are".

This is the world from which Science turns away, and in which Art takes its place. And if we can answer the question as to what Art is, we shall know what this world is with which Art has such intimate relationship.

It is not an important question as it stands. For Art, like life itself, has grown by its own impulse, and man has taken his pleasure in it without definitely knowing what it is. And we could safely leave it there, in the subsoil of consciousness, where things that are of life are nourished in the dark.

But we live in an age when our world is turned inside out and when whatever lies at the bottom is dragged to the surface. Our very process of living, which is an unconscious process, we must bring under the scrutiny of our knowledge,—even though to know is to kill our object of research and to make it a museum specimen.

The question has been asked, "What is Art?" and answers have been given by various persons. Such discussions introduce elements of conscious purpose into the region where both our faculties of creation and enjoyment have been spontaneous and half-conscious. They aim at supplying us with very definite standards by which to guide our judgment of art productions. Therefore we have heard judges in the modern time giving verdict, according to some special rules of their own making, for the dethronement of immortals whose supremacy has been unchallenged for centuries.



This meteorological disturbance in the atmosphere of art criticism, whose origin is in the West, has crossed over to our own shores in Bengal, bringing mist and clouds in its wake, where there was a clear sky. We have begun to ask ourselves whether creations of Art should not be judged either according to their fitness to be universally understood, or their philosophical interpretation of life, or their usefulness for solving the problems of the day, or their giving expression to something which is peculiar to the genius of the people to which the artist belongs. Therefore when men are seriously engaged in fixing the standard of value in Art by something which is not inherent in it, or, in other words, when the excellence of the river is going to be judged by the point of view of a canal, we cannot leave the question to its fate, but must take our part in the deliberations.

Should we begin with a definition? But definition of a thing which has a life growth is really limiting one's own vision in order to be able to see clearly. And clearness is not necessarily the only, or the most important, aspect of a truth. A bull's-eye lantern view is a clear view, but not a complete view. If we are to know a wheel in motion, we need not mind if all its spokes cannot be counted. When not merely the accuracy of shape, but velocity of motion, is important we have to be content with a somewhat imperfect definition of the wheel. Living things have far-reaching relationships with their surroundings, some of which are invisible and go deep down into the soil. In our zeal for definition we may lop off branches and roots of a tree to turn it into a log, which is easier to roll about from classroom to classroom, and therefore suitable for a text-books. But because it allows a nakedly clear view of itself, it cannot be said that a log gives a truer view of a tree as a whole.

Therefore I shall not define Art, but question myself about the reason of its existence, and try to find out whether it owes its origin to some social purpose, or to the need of catering for



our aesthetic enjoyment, or whether it has come out of some impulse of expression, which is the impulse of our being itself.

A fight has been going on for a long time round the saying, "Art for Art's sake," which seems to have fallen into disrepute among of a section of Western critics. It is a sign of the recurrence of the ascetic ideal of the puritanic age, when enjoyment as an end in itself was held to be sinful. But all puritanism is a reaction. It does not represent truth in its normal aspect. When enjoyment loses its direct touch with life, growing fastidious and fantastic in its world of elaborate conventions, then comes the call for renunciation which rejects happiness itself as a snare. I am not going into the history of your modern art, which I am not at all competent to discuss; yet I can assert, as a general truth, that when a man tries to thwart himself in his desire for delight, converting it merely into his desire to know, or to do good, then the case must be that his power of feeling delight has lost its natural bloom and healthiness.

The rhetoricians in old India had no hesitation in saying that enjoyment is the soul of literature,—the enjoyment which is disinterested. But the word "enjoyment" has to be used with caution. When analysed, its spectrum shows an endless series of rays of different worlds of stars. The art world contains elements which are distinctly its own and which emit lights that have their special range and property. It is our duty to distinguish them and arrive at their origin and growth.

The most important distinction between the animal and man is this, that the animal is very nearly bound within the limits of its necessities, the greater part of its activities being necessary for self-preservation and the preservation of the race. Like a retail shopkeeper, it has not large profit from its trade of life; the bulk of its earnings must be spent in paying back the interest to its bank. Most of its resources are employed in the mere endeavour to live. But man, in life's commerce,

is a big merchant. He earns a great deal more than he is absolutely compelled to spend. Therefore there is a vast excess of wealth in man's life, which gives him the freedom to be useless and irresponsible to a great measure. There are large outlying tracts, surrounding his necessities, where he has objects that are ends in themselves.

The animals must have knowledge, so that their knowledge can be employed for useful purposes of their life. But there they stop. They must know their surroundings in order to be able to take their shelter and seek their food, some properties of things in order to build their dwellings, some signs of the different seasons to be able to get ready to adapt themselves to the changes. Man also must know because he must live. But man has a surplus where he can proudly assert that knowledge is for the sake of knowledge. There he has the pure enjoyment of his knowledge, because there knowledge is freedom. Upon this fund of surplus his science and philosophy thrive.

Then again, there is a certain amount of altruism in the animal. It is the altruism of parenthood, the altruism of the herd and the hive. This altruism is absolutely necessary for race preservation. But in man there is a great deal more than this. Though he also has to be good, because goodness is necessary for his race, yet he goes far beyond that. His goodness is not a small pittance, barely sufficient for a hand-to-mouth moral existence. He can amply afford to say that goodness is for the sake of goodness. And upon this wealth of goodness, — where honesty is not valued for being the best policy, but because it can afford to go against all policies, — man's ethics are founded. The idea of "Art for Art's sake" also has its origin in this region of the superfluous. Let us, therefore, try to ascertain what activity it is, whose exuberance leads to the production of Art.

For man, as well as for animals, it is necessary to give expres-

sion to feelings of pleasure and displeasure, fear, anger and love. In animals, these emotional expressions have gone little beyond their bounds of usefulness. But in man, though they still have roots in their original purposes, they have spread their branches far and wide in the infinite sky high above their soil. Man has a fund of emotional energy which is not all occupied with his self-preservation. This surplus seeks its outlet in the creation of Art, for man's civilisation is built upon his surplus.

A warrior is not merely content with fighting, which is needful, but, by the aid of music and decorations, he must give expression to the heightened consciousness of the warrior in him, which is not only unnecessary, but in some cases suicidal. The man who has a strong religious feeling not only worships his deity with all care, but his religious personality craves, for its expression, the splendour of the temple, the rich ceremonials of worship.

When a feeling is aroused in our hearts which is far in excess of the amount that can be completely absorbed by the object which has produced it, it comes back to us and makes us conscious of ourselves by its return waves. When we are in poverty, all our attention is fixed outside us, — upon the objects which we must acquire for our need. But when our wealth greatly surpasses our needs, its light is reflected back upon us, and we have the exultation of feeling that we are rich persons. This is the reason why, of all creatures, only man knows himself, because his impulse of knowledge comes back to him in its excess. He feels his personality more intensely than other creatures, because his power of feeling is more than can be exhausted by his objects. The efflux of the consciousness of his personality requires an outlet of expression. Therefore, in Art, man reveals himself and not his objects. His objects have their place in books of information and science, where he has completely to conceal himself.

I know I shall not be allowed to pass unchallenged when I use the word "personality", which has such an amplitude of meaning. These loose words can be made to fit ideas which have not only different dimensions, but shapes also. They are like raincoats, hanging on the hall, which can be taken away by absent-minded individuals who have no claim upon them.

Man, as a knower, is not fully himself, — his mere information does not reveal him. But, as a person, he is the organic man, who has the inherent power to select things from his surroundings in order to make them his own. He has his forces of attraction and repulsion by which he not merely piles up things outside him, but creates himself. The principal creative forces, which transmute things into our living structure, are emotional forces. A man, where he is religious, is a person, but not where he is a mere theologian. His feeling for the divine is creative. But his mere knowledge of the divine cannot be formed into his own essence because of this lack of the emotional fire.

Let us here consider what are the contents of this personality and how it is related to the outer world. This world appears to us as an individual, and not merely as a bundle of invisible forces. For this, as everybody knows, it is greatly indebted to our senses and our mind. This apparent world is man's world. It has taken its special features of shape, colour and movement from the peculiar range and qualities of our perception. It is what our sense limits have specially acquired and built for us and walled up. Not only the physical and chemical forces, but man's perceptual forces, are its potent factors, — because it is man's world, and not an abstract world of physics or metaphysics. This world, which takes its form in the mould of man's perception, still remains only as the partial world of his senses and mind. It is like a guest and not like a kinsman. It becomes completely our own when it comes within the

range of our emotions. With our love and hatred, pleasure and pain, fear and wonder, continually working upon it, this world becomes a part of our personality. It grows with our growth, it changes with our changes. We are great or small, according to the magnitude and littleness of this assimilation, according to the quality of its sum total. If this world were taken away, our personality would lose all its content.

Our emotions are the gastric juices which transform this world of appearance into the more intimate world of sentiments. On the other hand, this outer world has its own juices, having their various qualities which excite our emotional activities. This is called in our Sanskrit rhetoric *rasa*, which signifies outer juices having their response in the inner juices of our emotions. And a poem, according to it, is a sentence or sentences containing juices, which stimulate the juices of emotion. It brings to us ideas, vitalized by feelings, ready to be made into the life-stuff of our nature.

Bare information on facts is not literature, because it gives us merely the facts which are independent of ourselves. Repetition of the facts that the sun is round, water is liquid, fire is hot, would be intolerable. But a description of the beauty of the sunrise has its eternal interest for us, — because there, it is not the fact of the sunrise, but its relation to ourselves, which is the object of perennial interest.

It is said in the Upanishad, that "Wealth is dear to us, not because we desire the fact of the wealth itself, but because we desire ourselves." This means that we feel ourselves in our wealth, — and therefore we love it. The things which arouse our emotions arouse our own self-feeling. It is like our touch upon the harp-string: if it is too feeble then we are merely aware of the touch, but if it is strong, then our touch comes back to us in tunes and our consciousness is intensified.

There is the world of science, from which the elements of personality have been carefully removed. We must not touch

it with our feelings. But there is also the vast world, which is personal to us. We must not merely know it, and then put it aside, but we must feel it, —because, by feeling it, we feel ourselves.

But how can we express our personality, which we only know by feeling? A scientist can make known what he has learned by analysis and experiment. But what an artist has to say, he cannot express by merely informing and explaining. The plainest language is needed when I have to say what I know about a rose, but to say what I feel about a rose is different. There it has nothing to do with facts, or with laws, — it deals with taste, which can be realized only by tasting. Therefore the Sanskrit rhetoricians say, in poetry we have to use words which have got the proper taste, — which do not merely talk, but conjure up pictures and sing. For pictures and songs are not merely facts, — they are personal facts. They are not only themselves, but ourselves also. They defy analysis and they have immediate access to our hearts.

It has to be conceded, that man cannot help revealing his personality, also, in the world of use. But there self-expression is not his primary object. In everyday life, when we are mostly moved by our habits, we are economical in our expression; for then our soul-consciousness is at its low level, — it has just volume enough to glide on in accustomed grooves. But when our heart is fully awakened in love, or in other great emotions, our personality is in its flood-tide. Then it feels the longing to express itself for the very sake of expression. Then comes Art, and we forget the claims of necessity, the thrift of usefulness — the spires of our temples try to kiss the stars and the notes of our music to fathom the depth of the ineffable.

Man's energies, running on two parallel lines, — that of utility and self-expression — tend to meet and mingle. By constant human associations sentiments gather around our things of use and invite the help of art to reveal themselves,—



as we see the warrior's pride and love revealed in the ornamental sword-blade, and the comradeship of festive gatherings in the wine goblet.

The lawyer's office, as a rule, is not a thing of beauty, and the reason is obvious. But in a city, where men are proud of their citizenship, public buildings must in their structure express this love for the city. When the British capital was removed from Calcutta to Delhi, there was discussion about the style of architecture which should be followed in the new buildings. Some advocated the Indian style of the Moghal period, — the style which was the joint production of the Moghal and the Indian genius. The fact that they lost sight of was that all true art has its origin in sentiment. Moghal Delhi and Moghal Agra show their human personality in their buildings. Moghal emperors were men, they were not mere administrators. They lived and died in India, they loved and fought. The memorials of their reigns do not persist in the ruins of factories and offices, but in immortal works of art, — not only in great buildings, but in pictures and music and workmanship in stone and metal, in cotton and wool fabrics. But the British government in India is not personal. It is official and therefore an abstraction. It has nothing to express in the true language of art. For law, efficiency and exploitation cannot sing themselves into epic stones. Lord Lytton, who unfortunately was gifted with more imagination than was necessary for an Indian Viceroy, tried to copy one of the state functions of the Moghals, — the Durbar ceremony. But state ceremonials are works of art. They naturally spring from the reciprocity of personal relationship between the people and their monarch. When they are copies, they show all the signs of the spurious.

How utility and sentiment take different lines in their expression can be seen in the dress of a man compared with that of a woman. A man's dress, as a rule, shuns all that is unnecessary

and merely decorative. But a woman has naturally selected the decorative, not only in her dress, but in her manners. She has to be picturesque and musical to make manifest what she truly is, — because, in her position in the world, woman is more concrete and personal than man. She is not to be judged merely by her usefulness, but by her delightfulness. Therefore she takes infinite care in expressing, not her profession, but her personality.

The principal object of art, also, being the expression of personality, and not of that which is abstract and analytical, it necessarily uses the language of picture and music. This has led to a confusion in our thought that the object of art is the production of beauty; whereas beauty in art has been the mere instrument and not its complete and ultimate significance.

As a consequence of this, we have often heard it argued whether manner, rather than matter, is the essential element in art. Such arguments become endless, like pouring water into a vessel whose bottom has been taken away. These discussions owe their origin to the idea that beauty is the object of art, and, because mere matter cannot have the property of beauty, it becomes a question whether manner is not the principal factor in art.

But the truth is, analytical treatment will not help us in discovering what is the vital point in art. For the true principle of art is the principle of unity. When we want to know the food-value of certain of our diets, we find it in their component parts; but its taste-value is in its unity, which cannot be analysed. Matter taken by itself, is an abstraction which can be dealt with by science; while manner, which is merely manner, is an abstraction which comes under the laws of rhetoric. But when they are indissolubly one, then they find their harmonics in our personality, which is an organic complex of matter and manner, thoughts and things, motives and actions.



Therefore we find all abstract ideas are out of place in true art, where, in order to gain admission, they must come under the disguise of personification. This is the reason why poetry tries to select words that have vital qualities, — words that are not for mere information, but have become naturalized in our hearts and have not been worn out of their shapes by too constant use in the market. For instance, the English word “consciousness” has not yet outgrown the cocoon stage of its scholastic inertia, therefore it is seldom used in poetry; whereas its Indian synonym “chetana” is a vital word and is of constant poetical use. On the other hand the English word “feeling” is fluid with life, but its Bengali synonym “anubhuti” is refused in poetry, because it merely has a meaning and no flavour. And likewise there are some truths, coming from science and philosophy, which have acquired life’s colour and taste, and some which have not. Until they have done this, they are, for art, like uncooked vegetables, unfit to be served at a feast. History, so long as it copies science and deals with abstractions, remains outside the domain of literature. But, as a narrative of facts, it takes its place by the side of the epic poem. For narration of historical facts imparts to the time to which they belong a taste of personality. Those periods become human to us, we feel their living heart-beats.

The world and the personal man are face to face, like friends who question one another and exchange their inner secrets. The world asks the inner man, — “Friend, have you seen me? Do you love? — not as one who provides you with foods and fruits, not as one whose laws you have found out, but as one who is personal, individual?”

The artist’s answer is, “Yes, I have seen you, I have loved and known you, — not that I have any need of you, not that I have taken you and used your laws for my own purposes of power. I know the forces that act and drive and lead to power, but it is not that. I see you, where you are what I am.”

But how do you know that the artist has known, has seen, has come face to face with this Personality?

When I first meet any one who is not yet my friend, I observe all the numberless inessential things which attract the attention at first sight: and in the wilderness of that diversity of facts the friend who is to be my friend is lost.

When our steamer reached the coast of Japan, one of our passengers, a Japanese, was coming back home from Rangoon; we on the other hand were reaching that shore for the first time in our life. There was a great difference in our outlook. We noted every little peculiarity, and innumerable small things occupied our attention. But the Japanese passenger dived at once into the personality, the soul of the land, where his own soul found satisfaction. He saw fewer things, we saw more things; but what he saw was the soul of Japan. It could not be gauged by any quantity or number, but by something invisible and deep. It could not be said, that because we saw those innumerable things, we saw Japan better, but rather the reverse.

If you ask me to draw some particular tree, and I am no artist, I try to copy every detail, lest I should otherwise lose the peculiarity of the tree, forgetting that the peculiarity is not the personality. But when the true artist comes, he overlooks all details and gets into the essential characterization.

Our rational man also seeks to simplify things into their inner principle; to get rid of the details; to get to the heart of things where things are One. But the difference is this, — the scientist seeks an impersonal principle of unification, which can be applied to all things. For instance he destroys the human body which is personal in order to find out physiology, which is impersonal and general.

But the artist finds out the unique, the individual, which yet is in the heart of the universal. When he looks on a tree,

he looks on that tree as unique, not as the botanist who generalizes and classifies. It is the function of the artist to particularize that one tree. How does he do it? Not through the peculiarity which is the discord of the unique, but through the personality which is harmony. Therefore he has to find out the inner concordance of that one thing with its outer surroundings of all things.

The greatness and beauty of Oriental art, especially in Japan and China, consist in this, that there the artists have seen this soul of things and they believe in it. The West may believe in the soul of Man, but she does not really believe that the universe has a soul. Yet this the belief of the East, and the whole mental contribution of the East to mankind is filled with this idea. So, we, in the East, need not go into details and emphasize them; for the most important thing is this universal soul, for which the Eastern sages have sat in meditation, and Eastern artists have joined them in artistic realization.

Because we have faith in this universal soul, we in the East know that Truth, Power, Beauty, lie in Simplicity, — where it is transparent, where things do not obstruct the inner vision. Therefore, all our sages have tried to make their lives simple and pure, because thus they have the realization of a positive Truth, which, though invisible, is more real than the gross and the numerous.

When we say that art only deals with those truths that are personal, we do not exclude philosophical ideas which are apparently abstract. They are quite common in our Indian literature, because they have been woven with the fibres of our personal nature. I give here an instance which will make my point clear. The following is a translation of an Indian poem written by a woman poet of mediaeval India, its subject is Life.

I salute the Life which is like a sprouting seed,  
With its one arm upraised in the air, and the other down in  
the soil;  
The Life which is one in its outer form and its inner sap;  
The Life that ever appears, yet ever eludes.  
The Life that comes I salute, and the Life that goes;  
I salute the Life that is revealed and that is hidden;  
I salute the Life in suspense, standing still like a mountain,  
And the Life of the surging sea of fire;  
The Life that is tender like a lotus, and hard like a thunderbolt.  
I salute the Life which is of the mind, with its one side in  
the dark and the other in the light.  
I salute the Life in the house and the Life abroad in the unknown,  
The Life full of joy and the Life weary with its pains,  
The Life eternally moving, rocking the world into stillness,  
The Life deep and silent, breaking out into roaring waves.

This idea of life is not a mere logical deduction; it is as real to the poetess as the air to the bird who feels it at every beat of its wings. Woman has realized the mystery of life in her child more intimately than man has done. This woman's nature in the poet has felt the deep stir of life in all the world. She has known it to be infinite, not through any reasoning process, but through the illumination of her feeling. Therefore the same idea, which is a mere abstraction to one whose sense of the reality is limited, becomes luminously real to another whose sensibility has a wider range. We have often heard the Indian mind described by Western critics as metaphysical, because it is ready to soar in the infinite. But it has to be noted that the infinite is not a mere matter of philosophical speculation to India; it is as real to her as the sunlight. She must see it, feel it, make use of it in her life. Therefore it has come out so profusely in her symbolism of worship, in her literature. The poet of the Upanishad has said that the

slightest movement of life would be impossible if the sky were not filled with infinite joy. This universal presence was as much of a reality to him as the earth under his feet, nay, even more. The realization of this has broken out in a song of an Indian poet who was born in the fifteenth century :

There falls the rhythmic beat of life and death :

Rapture wells forth, and all space is radiant with light.

There the unstruck music is sounded; it is the love music of three worlds.

There millions of lamps of sun and moon are burning;

There the drum beats and the lover swings in play.

There love songs resound, and light rains in showers.

In India, the greater part of our literature is religious, because God with us is not a distant God; He belongs to our homes, as well as to our temples. We feel His nearness to us in all the human relationship of love and affection, and in our festivities He is the chief guest whom we honour. In seasons of flowers and fruits, in the coming of the rain, in the fulness of the autumn, we see the hem of His mantle and hear His footsteps. We worship Him in all the true objects of our worship and love Him wherever our love is true. In the woman who is good we feel Him, in the man who is true we know Him, in our children He is born again and again, the Eternal Child. Therefore religious songs are our love songs, and our domestic occurrences, such as the birth of a son, or the coming of the daughter from her husband's house to her parents and her departure again, are woven in our literature as a drama whose counterpart is in the divine.

It is thus that the domain of literature has extended into the region which seems hidden in the depth of mystery and made it human and speaking. It is growing, keeping pace with the conquest made by the human personality in the realm of truth. It is growing, not only into history, science and philoso-

phy, but, with our expanding sympathy, into our social consciousness. The classical literature of the ancient time was only peopled by saints and kings and heroes. It threw no light upon men who loved and suffered in obscurity. But as the illumination of man's personality throws its light upon a wider space, penetrating into hidden corners, the world of Art also crosses its frontiers and extends its boundaries into unexplored regions. Thus art is signaling man's conquest by its symbols of beauty, springing up in spots which were barren of all voice and colours. It is supplying man with his banners, under which he marches to fight against the inane and the inert, proving his living claims far and wide in God's creation. Even the spirit of the desert has owned its kinship with him, and the lonely pyramids are there as memorials of the meeting of Nature's silence with the silence of the human spirit. The darkness of the caves has yielded its stillness to man's soul, and in exchange has secretly been crowned with the wreath of art. Bells are ringing in temples, in villages and populous towns to proclaim that the infinite is not a mere emptiness to man. This encroachment of man's personality has no limit, and even the markets and factories of the present age, even the schools where children of man are imprisoned and jails where are the criminals, will be mellowed with the touch of art, and lose their distinction of rigid discordance with life. For the one effort of man's personality is to transform everything with which he has any true concern into the human. And art is like the spread of vegetation, to show how far man has reclaimed the desert for his own.

We have said before that where there is an element of the superfluous in our heart's relationship with the world, Art has its birth. In other words, where our personality feels its wealth it breaks out in display. What we devour for ourselves is totally spent. What overflows our need becomes articulate. The stage of pure utility is like the state of heat which is dark.

When it surpasses itself, it becomes white heat and then it is expressive.

Take, for instance, our delight in eating. It is soon exhausted, it gives no indication of the infinite. Therefore, though in its extensiveness it is more universal than any other passion, it is rejected by art. It is like an immigrant coming to these Atlantic shores, who can show no cash balance in his favour.

In our life we have one side which is finite, where we exhaust ourselves at every step, and we have another side, where our aspiration, enjoyment and sacrifice are infinite. This infinite side of man must have its revealments in some symbols which have the elements of immortality. There it naturally seeks perfection. Therefore it refuses all that is flimsy and feeble and incongruous. It builds for its dwelling a paradise, where only those materials are used that have transcended the earth's mortality.

For men are the children of light. Whenever they fully realize themselves they feel their immortality. And, as they feel it, they extend their realm of the immortal into every region of human life.

This building of man's true world, — the living world of truth and beauty, — is the function of Art.

Man is true, where he feels his infinity, where he is divine, and the divine is the creator in him. Therefore with the attainment of his truth he creates. He would hear the same message that came from the Indian sage of the ancient time:

"Harken to me, ye children of the Immortal, dwellers of the heavenly worlds, I have known the Supreme Person who comes as light from the dark beyond."

Yes, it is that Supreme Person, who has made himself known to man and made this universe so deeply personal to him. Therefore, in India, our places of pilgrimage are there, where in the confluence of the river and the sea, in the eternal snow of the mountain peak, in the lonely seashore, some aspect



of the infinite is revealed which has its great voice for our heart, and there man has left in his images and temples, in his carvings of stone, these words, — "Harken to me, I have known the Supreme Person." In the mere substance and law of this world we do not meet the Person, but where the sky is blue, and the grass is green, where the flower has its beauty and fruit its taste, where there is not only perpetuation of race, but joy of living and love of fellow-creatures, sympathy and self-sacrifice, there is revealed to us the Person who is infinite. There, not merely are facts pelted down upon our heads, but we feel the bond of the personal relationship binding our hearts with this world through all time. And this is Reality, which is truth made our own, truth that has its eternal relation with the Supreme Person. This world, whose soul seems to be aching for expression is its endless rhythm of lines and colours, music and movements, hints and whispers, and all the suggestion of the inexpressible, finds its harmony in the ceaseless longing of the human heart to make the Person manifest in its own creations.

The desire for the manifestation of this Person makes us lavish with all our resources. When we accumulate wealth, we have to account for every penny; we reason accurately and we act with care. But when we set about to express our wealthiness, we seem to lose sight of all lines of limit. In fact, none of us has wealth enough fully to express what we mean by wealthiness. When we try to save our life from an enemy's attack, we are cautious in our movements. But when we feel impelled to express our personal bravery, we willingly take risks and go to the length of losing our lives. We are careful of expenditure in our everyday life, but on festive occasions, when we express our joy, we are thriftless even to the extent of going beyond our means. For when we are intensely conscious of our own personality, we are apt to ignore the tyranny of facts. We are temperate in our dealings



with the man with whom our relation is the relationship of prudence. But we feel we have not got enough for those whom we love. The poet says of the beloved: "It seems to me that I have gazed at your beauty from the beginning of my existence, that I have kept you in my arms for countless ages, yet it has not been enough for me."

He says, "Stones would melt in tenderness, if touched by the breeze of your mantle."

He feels that his "eyes long to fly like birds to see his beloved."

Judged from the standpoint of reason these are exaggerations, but from that of the heart, freed from limits of facts, they are true. Is it not the same in God's creation? There force and matters are alike mere facts — they have their strict accounts kept and they can be accurately weighed and measured. Only beauty is not a mere fact; it cannot be surveyed and mapped. It is an expression. Facts are like wine-cups that carry it, they are hidden by it, it overflows them. It is infinite in its suggestions, it is extravagant in its words. It is personal, therefore, beyond science. It sings as does the poet, "It seems to me that I have gazed at you from the beginning of my existence, that I have kept you in my arms for countless ages, yet it has not been enough for me."

So we find that our world of expression does not accurately coincide with the world of facts, because personality surpasses facts on every side. It is conscious of its infinity and creates from its abundance; and because, in art, things are challenged from the standpoint of the immortal Person, those which are important in our customary life of facts become unreal when placed on the pedestal of art. A newspaper account of some domestic incident in the life of a commercial magnate may create agitation in Society, yet would lose all its significance if placed by the side of great works of art. We can well imagine how it would hide its face in shame, if by some

cruel accident it found itself in the neighbourhood of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

Yet the very same incident, if treated deeply, divested of its conventional superficiality, might have a better claim in art than the negotiation for raising a big loan for China, or the defeat of British diplomacy in Turkey. A mere household event of a husband's jealousy of his wife, as depicted in one of Shakespeare's tragedies, has greater value in the realm of art than the code of caste regulations in Manu's scripture or the law prohibiting inhabitants of one part of the world from receiving human treatment in another. For when facts are looked upon as mere facts, having their chain of consequences in the world of facts, they are rejected by art.

When, however, such laws and regulations as I have mentioned are viewed in their application to some human individual, in all their injustice, insult and pain, then they are seen in their complete truth and they become subjects for art. The disposition of a great battle may be a great fact, but it is useless for the purpose of art. But what that battle has caused to a single individual soldier, separated from his loved ones and maimed for his life, has a vital value for art which deals with reality.

Man's social world is like some nebulous system of stars, consisting largely of a mist of abstractions, with such names as society, state, nation, commerce, politics and war. In their dense amorphousness man is hidden and truth is blurred. The one vague idea of war covers from our sight a multitude of miseries, and obscures our sense of reality. The idea of the nation is responsible for crimes that would be appalling, if the mist could be removed for a moment. The idea of society has created forms, of slavery without number, which we tolerate simply because it has deadened our consciousness of the reality of the personal man. In the name of religion deeds have been done that would exhaust all the resources

of hell itself for punishment, because with its creeds and dogmas it has applied an extensive plaster of anaesthetic over a large surface of feeling humanity. Everywhere in man's world the Supreme Person is suffering from the killing of the human reality by the imposition of the abstract. In our schools the idea of the class hides the reality of the school children; they become students and not individuals. Therefore, it does not hurt us to see children's lives crushed, in their classes, like flowers pressed between book leaves. In government, the bureaucracy deals with generalizations and not with men. And therefore it costs it nothing to indulge in wholesale cruelties. Once we accept as truth such a scientific maxim as "Survival of the Fittest" it immediately transforms the whole world of human personality into a monotonous desert of abstraction, where things become dreadfully simple because robbed of their mystery of life.

In these large tracts of nebulousness Art is creating its stars, stars that are definite in their forms but infinite in their personality. Art is calling us the "children of the immortal," and proclaiming our right to dwell in the heavenly worlds.

What is it in man that asserts its immortality in spite of the obvious fact of death? It is not his physical body or his mental organization. It is that deeper unity, that ultimate mystery in him, which, from the centre of his world, radiates towards its circumference; which is in his body, yet transcends his body; which is in his mind, yet grows beyond his mind; which, through the things belonging to him, expresses something that is not in them; which, while occupying his present, overflows its banks of the past and the future. It is the personality of man, conscious of its inexhaustible abundance; it has the paradox in it that it is more than itself; it is more than as it is seen, as it is known, as it is used. And this consciousness of the infinite, in the personal man, ever strives to make its expressions immortal and to make the whole world its own.

In Art the person in us is sending its answers to the Supreme Person, who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightless world of facts.

From lectures delivered in America.

I WAS born in 1861 : That is not an important date of history, but it belongs to a great epoch in Bengal, when the currents of three movements had met in the life of our country. One of these, the religious, was introduced by a very great-hearted man of gigantic intelligence, Raja Rammohan Roy. It was revolutionary, for he tried to reopen the channel of spiritual life which had been obstructed for many years by the sands and debris of creeds that were formal and materialistic, fixed in external practices lacking spiritual significance. People who cling to an ancient past have their pride in the antiquity of their accumulations, in the sublimity of time-honoured walls around them. They grow nervous and angry when some great spirit, some lover of truth, breaks open their enclosure and floods it with the sunshine of thought and the breath of life. Ideas cause movement and all forward movements they consider to be a menace to their warehouse security.

This was happening about the time I was born. I am proud to say that my father was one of the great leaders of that movement, a movement for whose sake he suffered ostracism and braved social indignities. I was born in this atmosphere of the advent of new ideals, which at the same time were old, older than all the things of which that age was proud.

There was a second movement equally important. Bankimchandra Chatterjee, who, though much older than myself, was my contemporary and lived long enough for me to see him, was the first pioneer in the literary revolution which happened in Bengal about that time. Before his arrival our literature had been oppressed by a rigid rhetoric that choked its life and loaded it with ornaments that became its fetters. Bankimchandra was brave enough to go against the orthodoxy which believed in the security of tombstones and in that finality which can only belong to the lifeless. He lifted the dead weight of ponderous forms from our language and with a touch of his magic wand aroused our literature from her age-long sleep. A great promise and a vision of beauty she revealed to us when she awoke in the fullness of her strength and grace.

There was yet another movement started about this time called the National. It was not fully political, but it began to give voice to the mind of our people trying to assert their own personality. It was a voice of impatience at the humiliation constantly heaped upon us by people who were not oriental, and who had, especially at that time, the habit of sharply dividing the human world into the good and the bad according to the hemispheres to which they belong.

This contemptuous spirit of separatedness was perpetually hurting us and causing great damage to our own world of culture. It generated in our young men a distrust of all things that had come to them as an inheritance from their past. The old Indian pictures and other works of art were laughed at by our students in imitation of the laughter of their European schoolmasters of that age of philistinism.

Though later on our teachers themselves had changed their minds, their disciples had hardly yet fully regained confidence in the merit of our art. They have had a long period of encouragement in developing an appetite for

third-rate copies of French pictures, for gaudy oleographs abjectly cheap, for the pictures that are products of mechanical accuracy of a stereotyped standard, and they still considered it to be a symptom of superior culture to be able disdainfully to refuse oriental works of creation.

The modern young men of that period nodded their heads and said that true originality lay not in the discovery of the rhythm of the essential in the heart of reality but in the full lips, tinted cheeks and bare breasts of imported pictures. The same spirit of rejection, born of utter ignorance, was cultivated in other departments of our culture. It was the result of the hypnotism exercised upon the minds of the younger generation by people who were loud of voice and strong of arm. The national movement was started to proclaim that we must not be indiscriminate in our rejection of the past. This was not a reactionary movement but a revolutionary one, because it set out with a great courage to deny and to oppose all pride in mere borrowings.

These three movements were on foot and in all three the members of my own family took active part. We were ostracized because of our heterodox opinions about religion and therefore we enjoyed the freedom of the outcast. We had to build our own world with our own thoughts and energy of mind.

I was born and brought up in an atmosphere of the confluence of three movements, all of which were revolutionary. My family had to live its own life, which led me from my young days to seek guidance for my own self-expression in my own inner standard of judgment. The medium of expression doubtless was my mother tongue. But the language which belonged to the people had to be modulated according to the urge which I as an individual had.

No poet should borrow his medium ready-made from some shop of orthodox respectability. He should not only have his



own seeds but prepare his own soil. Each poet has his own distinct medium of language—not because the whole language is of his own make, but because his individual use of it, having life's magic touch, transforms it into a special vehicle of his own creation.

The races of man have poetry in their heart and it is necessary for them to give, as far as is possible, a perfect expression to their sentiments. For this they must have a medium, moving and pliant, which can freshly become their very own, age after age. All great languages have undergone and are still undergoing changes. Those languages which resist the spirit of change are doomed and will never produce great harvests of thought and literature. When forms become fixed, the spirit either weakly accepts its imprisonment within them or rebels. All revolutions consist of the fight of the within against invasion by the without.

There was a great chapter in the history of life on this earth when some irresistible inner force in man found its way out into the scheme of things, and sent forth its triumphant mutinous voice, with the cry that it was not going to be overwhelmed from outside by the huge brute beast of a body. How helpless it appeared at the moment, but has it not nearly won? In our social life also, revolution breaks out when some power concentrates itself in outside arrangements and threatens to enslave for its own purpose the power which we have within us.

When an organization which is a machine becomes a central force, political, commercial, educational or religious, it obstructs the free flow of inner life of the people and way-lays and exploits it for the augmentation of its own power. To-day, such concentration of power is fast multiplying on the outside and the cry of the oppressed spirit of man is in the air which struggles to free itself from the grip of screws and bolts, of unmeaning obsessions.



Revolution must come and men must risk revilement and misunderstanding, especially from those who want to be comfortable, who put their faith in materialism, and who belong truly to the dead past and not modern times, the past that had its age in distant antiquity when physical flesh and size predominated, and not the mind of man.

Purely physical dominance is mechanical and modern machines are merely exaggerating our bodies, lengthening and multiplying our limbs. The modern mind, in its innate childishness, delights in this enormous bodily bulk, representing an inordinate material power, saying: "Let me have the big toy and no sentiment which can disturb it." It does not realize that in this we are returning to that antediluvian age which revelled in its production of gigantic physical frames, leaving no room for the freedom of the inner spirit.

All great human movements in the world are related to some great ideal. Some of you may say that such a doctrine of spirit has been in its death-throes for over a century and is now moribund; that we have nothing to rely upon but external forces and material foundations. But I say, on my part, that your doctrine was obsolete long ago. It was exploded in the springtime of life, when mere size was swept off the face of the world, and was replaced by man, brought naked into the heart of creation, man with this helpless body, but with his indomitable mind and spirit.

When I began my life as a poet, the writers among our educated community took their guidance from their English text-books which poured upon them lessons that did not fully saturate their minds. I suppose it was fortunate for me that I never in my life had the kind of academic training which is considered proper for a boy of a respectable family. Though I cannot say I was altogether free from the influence that ruled young minds of those days, the course of my writings was nevertheless saved from the groove of imitative forms. In

my versification, vocabulary and ideas, I yielded myself to the vagaries of an untutored fancy which brought castigation upon me from critics who were learned, and uproarious laughter from the witty. My ignorance combined with my heresy turned me into a literary outlaw.

When I began my career I was ridiculously young; in fact, I was the youngest of that band who had made themselves articulate. I had neither the protective armour of mature age, nor enough English to command respect. So in my seclusion of contempt and qualified encouragement I had my freedom. Gradually I grew up in years—for which, however, I claim no credit. Steadily I cut my way through derision and occasional patronage into a recognition in which the proportion of praise and blame was very much like that of land and water on our earth.

What gave me boldness when I was young was my early acquaintance with the old Vaishnava poems of Bengal, full of the freedom of metre and courage of expression. I think I was only twelve when these poems first began to be reprinted. I surreptitiously got hold of copies from the desks of my elders. For the edification of the young I must confess that this was not right for a boy of my age. I should have been passing my examinations and not following a path that would lead to loss of marks. I must also admit that the greater part of these lyrics was erotic and not quite suited to a boy just about to reach his teens. But my imagination was fully occupied with the beauty of their forms and the music of their words; and their breath, heavily laden with voluptuousness, passed over my mind without distracting it.

My vagabondage in the path of my literary career had another reason. My father was the leader of a new religious movement, a strict monotheism based upon the teachings of the Upanishads. My countrymen in Bengal thought him almost as bad as a Christian, if not worse. So we were completely

ostracized, which probably saved me from another disaster, that of imitating our own past.

Most of the members of my family had some gift—some were artists, some poets, some musicians and the whole atmosphere of our home was permeated with the spirit of creation. I had a deep sense almost from infancy of the beauty of Nature, an intimate feeling of companionship with the trees and the clouds, and felt in tune with the musical touch of the seasons in the air. At the same time, I had a peculiar susceptibility to human kindness. All these craved expression. The very earnestness of my emotions yearned to be true to themselves, though I was too immature to give their expression any perfection of form.

Since then I have gained a reputation in my country, but till very late a strong current of antagonism in a large section of my countrymen persisted. Some said that my poems did not spring from the national heart; some complained that they were incomprehensible; others that they were unwholesome. In fact, I have never had complete acceptance from my own people, and that too has been a blessing; for nothing is so demoralizing as unqualified success.

This is the history of my career. I wish I could reveal it more clearly through the narration of my own work in my own language. I hope that will be possible some day or other. Languages are jealous. They do not give up their best treasures to those who try to deal with them through an intermediary belonging to an alien rival. We have to court them in person and dance attendance on them. Poems are not like market commodities, transferable. We cannot receive the smiles and glances of our sweetheart through an attorney, however diligent and dutiful he may be.

I myself have tried to get at the wealth of beauty in the literature of the European languages, long before I gained a full right to their hospitality. When I was young I tried to

approach Dante, unfortunately through an English translation. I failed utterly, and felt it my pious duty to desist. Dante remained a closed book to me.

I also wanted to know German literature and, by reading Heine in translation, I thought I had caught a glimpse of the beauty there. Fortunately I met a missionary lady from Germany and asked her help. I worked hard for some months, but being rather quickwitted, which is not a good quality, I was not persevering. I had the dangerous facility which helps one to guess the meaning too easily. My teacher thought I had almost mastered the language, which was not true. I succeeded, however, in getting through Heine, like a man walking in sleep crossing unknown paths with ease, and I found immense pleasure.

Then I tried Goethe. But that was too ambitious. With the help of the little German I had learnt, I did go through *Faust*. I believe I found my entrance to the palace, not like one who has keys for all the doors, but as a casual visitor who is tolerated in some general guest-room, comfortable but not intimate. Properly speaking, I do not know my Goethe, and in the same way many other great luminaries are dusky to me.

This is as it should be. Man cannot reach the shrine if he does not make the pilgrimage. So, one must not hope to find anything true from my own language in translation.

In regard to music, I claim to be something of a musician myself. I have composed many songs which have defied the canons of orthodox propriety and good people are disgusted at the impudence of a man who is audacious only because he is untrained. But I persist, and God forgives me because I do not know what I do. Possibly that is the best way of doing things in the sphere of art. For I find that people blame, but also sing my songs, even if not always correctly.

Please do not think I am vain. I can judge myself objectively

and can openly express admiration for my own work, because I am modest. I do not hesitate to say that my songs have found their place in the heart of my land, along with her flowers that are never exhausted, and that the folk of the future, in days of joy or sorrow or festival, will have to sing them. This too is the work of a revolutionist.

If I feel reluctant to speak about my own view of religion, it is because I have not come to my own religion through the portals of passive acceptance of a particular creed owing to some accident of birth. I was born to a family who were pioneers in the revival in our country of a religion based upon the utterance of Indian sages in the Upanishads. But owing to my idiosyncrasy of temperament, it was impossible for me to accept any religious teaching on the only ground that people in my surroundings believed it to be true. I could not persuade myself to imagine that I had religion simply because everybody whom I might trust believed in its value.

My religion is essentially a poet's religion. Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channels as does the inspiration of my music. My religious life has followed the same mysterious line of growth as has my poetical life. Somehow they are wedded to each other, and though their betrothal had a long period of ceremony, it was kept secret from me. I am not, I hope, boasting when I confess to my gift of poesy, an instrument of expression delicately responsive to the breath that comes from depth of feeling. From my infancy I had the keen sensitiveness which always kept my mind tingling with consciousness of the world around me, natural and human.

I had been blessed with that sense of wonder which gives a child his right of entry into the treasure-house of mystery which is in the heart of existence. I neglected my studies because they rudely summoned me away from the world around me, which was my friend and my companion, and when I was

thirteen I freed myself from the clutch of an educational system that tried to keep me imprisoned within the stone-walls of lessons.

I had a vague notion as to who or what it was that touched my heart's chords, like the infant which does not know its mother's name, or who or what she is. The feeling which I always had was a deep satisfaction of personality that flowed into my nature through living channels of communication from all sides.

It was a great thing for me that my consciousness was never dull about the facts of the surrounding world. That the cloud was the cloud, that a flower was a flower, was enough, because they directly spoke to me, because I could not be indifferent to them. I still remember the very moment, one afternoon, when coming back from school I alighted from the carriage and suddenly saw in the sky, behind the upper terrace of our house, an exuberance of deep, dark rain-clouds lavishing rich, cool shadows on the atmosphere. The marvel of it, the very generosity of its presence, gave me a joy which was freedom, the freedom we feel in the love of our dear friend.

There is an illustration I have made use of in another paper, in which I supposed that a stranger from some other planet has paid a visit to our earth and happens to hear the sound of a human voice on the gramophone. All that is obvious to him, and most seemingly active, is the revolving disk; he is unable to discover the personal truth that lies behind, and so might accept the impersonal scientific fact of the disk as final—the fact that could be touched and measured. He would wonder how it could be possible for a machine to speak to the soul. Then if in pursuing the mystery, he should suddenly come to the heart of the music through a meeting with the composer, he would at once understand the meaning of that music as a personal communication.

Mere information of facts, mere discovery of power, belongs



to the outside and not to the inner soul of things. Gladness is the one criterion of truth as we know when we have touched Truth by the music it gives, by the joy of the greeting it sends forth to the truth in us. That is the true foundation of all religions; it is not in dogma. As I have said before, it is not as ether waves that we receive light; the morning does not wait for some scientist for its introduction to us. In the same way, we touch the infinite reality immediately within us only when we perceive the pure truth of love or goodness, not through the explanation of theologians, not through the erudite discussion of ethical doctrines.

I have already confessed that my religion is a poet's religion; all that I feel about it is from vision and not from knowledge. I frankly say that I cannot satisfactorily answer questions about the problem of evil, or about what happens after death. And yet I am sure that there have come moments when my soul has touched the infinite and has become intensely conscious of it through the illumination of joy. It has been said in our Upanishads that our mind and our words come away baffled from the supreme Truth, but he who knows That, through the immediate joy of his own soul, is saved from all doubts and fears.

In the night we stumble over things and become acutely conscious of their individual separateness, but the day reveals the great unity which embraces them. And the man, whose inner vision is bathed in an illumination of his consciousness, at once realizes the spiritual unity reigning supreme over all differences of race and his mind no longer awkwardly stumbles over individual facts of separateness in the human world, accepting them as final; he realizes that peace is in the inner harmony which dwells in truth, and not in any outer adjustments; and that beauty carries an eternal assurance of our spiritual relationship to reality, which waits for its perfection in the response of our love.

## II

The renowned Vedic commentator, Sāyanāchārya, says:

यज्ञे हुतावशिष्टस्य ओदनस्य सर्वजगत्कारणभूता

ब्रह्माभेदेण स्तुतिः क्रियते ॥

The food offering which is left over after the completion of sacrificial rites is praised because it is symbolical of Brahma, the original source of the universe.

According to this explanation, Brahma is boundless in his superfluity which inevitably finds its expression in the eternal world process. Here we have the doctrine of the genesis of creation, and therefore of the origin of art. Of all living creatures in the world, man has his vital and mental energy vastly in excess of his need, which urges him to work in various lines of creation for its own sake. Like Brahma himself, he takes joy in productions that are unnecessary to him, and therefore representing his extravagance and not his hand-to-mouth penury. The voice that is just enough can speak and cry to the extent needed for everyday use, but that which is abundant sings, and in it we find our joy. Art reveals man's wealth of life, which seeks its freedom in forms of perfection which are an end in themselves.

All that is inert and inanimate is limited to the bare fact of existence. Life is perpetually creative because it contains in itself that surplus which ever overflows the boundaries of the immediate time and space, restlessly pursuing its adventure of expression in the varied forms of self-realization. Our living body has its vital organs that are important in maintaining its efficiency, but this body is not a mere convenient sac for the purpose of holding stomach, heart, lungs and brains; it is an image—its highest value is in the fact that it communicates its personality. It has colour, shape and movement, most of which belong to the superfluous, that are needed only for self-expression and not for self-preservation.



This living atmosphere of superfluity in man is dominated by his imagination, as the earth's atmosphere by the light. It helps us to integrate desultory facts in a vision of harmony and then to translate it into our activities for the very joy of its perfection, it invokes in us the Universal Man who is the seer and the doer of all times and countries. The immediate consciousness of reality in its purest form, unobscured by the shadow of self-interest, irrespective of moral or utilitarian recommendation, gives us joy as does the self-revealing personality of our own. What in common language we call beauty, which is in harmony of lines, colours, sounds, or in grouping of words or thoughts, delights us only because we cannot help admitting a truth in it that is ultimate. "Love is enough", the poet has said; it carries its own explanation, the joy of which can only be expressed in a form of art which also has that finality. Love gives evidence to something which is outside us but which intensely exists and thus stimulates the sense of our own existence. It radiantly reveals the reality of its objects, though these may lack qualities that are valuable or brilliant.

The *I am* in me realizes its own extension, its own infinity whenever it truly realizes something else. Unfortunately, owing to our limitations and a thousand and one preoccupations, a great part of our world, though closely surrounding us, is far away from the lamp-post of our attention: it is dim, it passes by us, a caravan of shadows, like the landscape seen in the night from the window of an illuminated railway compartment: the passenger knows that the outside world exists, that it is important, but for the time being the railway carriage for him is far more significant. If among the innumerable objects in this world there be a few that come under the full illumination of our soul and thus assume reality for us, they constantly cry to our creative mind for a permanent representation. They belong to the same domain as the desire of ours

which represents the longing for the permanence of our own self.

I do not mean to say that things to which we are bound by the tie of self-interest have the inspiration of reality; on the contrary, these are eclipsed by the shadow of our own self. The servant is not more real to us than the beloved. The narrow emphasis of utility diverts our attention from the complete man to the merely useful man. The thick label of market-price obliterates the ultimate value of reality.

That fact that we exist has its truth in the fact that everything else does exist, and the "I am" in me crosses its finitude whenever it deeply realizes itself in the "Thou art." This crossing of the limit produces joy, the joy that we have in beauty, in love, in greatness. Self-forgetting, and in a higher degree, self-sacrifice, is our acknowledgment of this our experience of the infinite. This is the philosophy which explains our joy in all arts, the arts that in their creations intensify the sense of the unity which is the unity of truth we carry within ourselves. The personality in me is a self-conscious principle of a living unity; it at once comprehends and yet transcends all the details of facts that are individually mine, my knowledge, feeling, wish and will, my memory, my hope, my love, my activities, and all my belongings. This personality which has the sense of the *One* in its nature, realizes it in things, thoughts and facts made into units. The principle of unity which it contains is more or less perfectly satisfied in a beautiful face or a picture, a poem, a song, a character or a harmony of inter-related ideas or facts and then for it these things become intensely real, and therefore joyful. Its standard of reality, the reality that has its perfect revelation in a perfection of harmony, is hurt when there is a consciousness of discord—because discord is against the fundamental unity which is in its centre.

All other facts have come to us through the gradual course of our experience, and our knowledge of them is constantly

undergoing contradictory changes through the discovery of new data. We can never be sure that we have come to know the final character of anything that there is. But such a knowledge has come to us immediately with a conviction which needs no arguments to support it. It is this, that all my activities have their sources in this personality of mine which is indefinable and yet about the truth of which I am more certain than anything in this world. Though all the direct evidence that can be weighed and measured support the fact that only my fingers are producing marks on the paper, yet no sane man ever can doubt that it is not these mechanical movements that are the true origin of my writings but some entity that can never be known, unless known through sympathy. Thus we have come to realize in our own person the two aspects of activities, one of which is the aspect of law represented in the medium, and the other the aspect of will residing in the personality.

Limitation of the unlimited is personality : God is personal where He creates.

He accepts the limits of His own law and the play goes on, which is this world whose reality is in its relation to the Person. Things are distinct not in their essence but in their appearance ; in other words, in their relation to one to whom they appear. This is Art, the truth of which is not in substance or logic, but in expression. Abstract truth may belong to science and metaphysics, but the world of reality belongs to Art.

The world as an art is the play of the Supreme Person revelling in image-making. Try to find out the ingredients of the image—they elude you, they never reveal to you the eternal secret of appearance. In your effort to capture life as expressed in living tissue, you will find carbon, nitrogen and many other things utterly unlike life, but never life itself. The appearance does not offer any commentary of itself through its material. You may call it *māyā* and pretend to disbelieve it,

but the great artist, the *māyāvin*, is not hurt. For art is *māyā*, it has no other explanation but that it seems to be what it is. It never tries to conceal its evasiveness, it mocks even its own definition and plays the game of hide-and-seek through its constant flight in changes.

And thus life, which is an incessant explosion of freedom, finds its metre in a continual falling back in death. Every day is a death, every moment even. If not, there would be amorphous desert of deathlessness eternally dumb and still. So life is *māyā*, as moralists love to say; it *is* and *is not*. All that we find in it is the rhythm through which it shows itself. Are rocks and minerals any better? Has not science shown us the fact that the ultimate difference between one element and another is only that of rhythm? The fundamental distinction of gold from mercury lies merely in the difference of rhythm in their respective atomic constitution, like the distinction of the king from his subject which is not in their different constituents, but in the different metres of their situation and circumstance. There you find behind the scene the Artist, the Magician of rhythm, who imparts an appearance of substance to the unsubstantial.

What is rhythm? It is the movement generated and regulated by harmonious restriction. This is the creative force in the hand of the artist. So long as words remain in uncadenced prose form, they do not give any lasting feeling of reality. The moment they are taken and put into rhythm they vibrate into a radiance. It is the same with the rose. In the pulp of its petals you may find everything that went to make the rose, but the rose which is *māyā*, an image, is lost; its finality which has the touch of the infinite is gone. The rose appears to me to be still, but because of its metre of composition it has a lyric of movement within that stillness, which is the same as the dynamic quality of a picture that has a perfect harmony. It produces a music in our consciousness by giving it a swing

of motion synchronous with its own. Had the picture consisted of a disharmonious aggregate of colours and lines, it would be deadly still.

In perfect rhythm, the art-form becomes like the stars which in their seeming stillness are never still, like a motionless flame that is nothing but movement. A great picture is always speaking, but news from a newspaper, even of some tragic happening, is still-born. Some news may be a mere commonplace in the obscurity of a journal ; but give it a proper rhythm and it will never cease to shine. That is art. It has the magic wand which gives undying reality to all things it touches, and relates them to the personal being in us. We stand before its productions and say : I know you as I know myself, you are real.

A Chinese friend of mine, while travelling with me through the streets of Peking, suddenly, with great excitement, called my attention to a donkey. Ordinarily a donkey does not have any special force of truth for us, except when it kicks us or when we need its reluctant service. But in such cases, the truth is not emphasized in the donkey but in some purpose or bodily pain exterior to it. The behaviour of my Chinese friend at once reminded me of the Chinese poems in which the delightful sense of reality is so spontaneously felt and so simply expressed.

This sensitiveness to the touch of things, such abundant delight in the recognition of them, is obstructed when insistent purposes become innumerable and intricate in our society, when problems crowd in our path clamouring for attention, and life's movement is impeded with things and thoughts too difficult for a harmonious assimilation.

This has been growing evident every day in the modern age, which gives more time to the acquisition of life's equipment than to the enjoyment of it. In fact, life itself is made secondary to life's materials, even like a garden buried under

the bricks gathered for the garden wall. Somehow the mania for bricks and mortar grows, the kingdom of rubbish dominates, the days of spring are made futile and the flowers never come.

Our modern mind, a hasty tourist, in its rush over the miscellaneous, ransacks cheap markets of curios which mostly are delusions. This happens because its natural sensibility for simple aspects of existence is dulled by constant preoccupations that divert it. The literature that it produces seems always to be poking her nose into out-of-the-way places for things and effects that are out of the common. She racks her resources in order to be striking. She elaborates inconstant changes in style, as in modern millinery; and the product suggests more the polish of steel than the bloom of life.

Fashions in literature that rapidly tire of themselves seldom come from the depth. They belong to the frothy rush of the surface, with its boisterous clamours for the recognition of the moment. Such literature, by its very strain, exhausts its inner development and quickly passes through outer changes like autumn leaves—produces with the help of paints and patches an up-to-dateness, shaming its own appearance of the immediately preceding date. Its expressions are often grimaces, like the cactus of the desert which lacks modesty in its distortions and peace in its thorns, in whose attitude an aggressive discourtesy bristles up, suggesting a forced pride of poverty. We often come across its analogy in some of the modern writings which are difficult to ignore because of their prickly surprises and paradoxical gesticulations. Wisdom is not rare in these works, but it is a wisdom that has lost confidence in its serene dignity, afraid of being ignored by crowds which are attracted by the extravagant and the unusual. It is sad to see wisdom struggling to seem clever, a prophet arrayed in caps and bells before an admiring multitude.

But in all great arts, literary or otherwise, man has expressed

his feelings that are usual in a form that is unique and yet not abnormal. When Wordsworth described in his poem a life deserted by love, he invoked for his art the *usual* pathos expected by all normal minds in connection with such a subject. But the picture in which he incarnated the sentiment was unexpected and yet every sane reader acknowledges it with joy when the image is held before him of

....a forsaken bird's nest filled with snow  
Mid its own bush of leafless eglantine.

On the other hand, I have read some modern writing in which the coming out of the stars in the evening is described as the sudden eruption of disease in the bloated body of darkness. The writer seems afraid to own the feeling of a cool purity in the star-sprinkled night which is *usual*, lest he should be found out as commonplace. From the point of view of realism the image may not be wholly inappropriate and may be considered as outrageously virile in its unshrinking incivility. But this is not art; this is a jerky shriek, something like the convulsive advertisement of the modern market that exploits mob psychology against its inattention. To be tempted to create an illusion of forcefulness through an over-emphasis of abnormality is a sign of anaesthesia. It is the waning vigour of imagination which employs desperate dexterity in the present-day art for producing shocks in order to poke out into a glare the sensation of the unaccustomed. When we find that the literature of any period is laborious in the pursuit of a spurious novelty in its manner and matter, we must know that it is the symptom of old age, of anaemic sensibility which seeks to stimulate its palsied taste with the pungency of indecency and the tingling touch of intemperance. It has been explained to me that these symptoms mostly are the outcome of a reaction against the last-century literature which developed a mannerism too daintily saccharine,



unmanly in the luxury of its toilet and over-delicacy of its expressions. It seemed to have reached an extreme limit of refinement which almost codified its conventions, making it easy for the timid talents to reach a comfortable level of literary respectability. This explanation may be true; but unfortunately reactions seldom have the repose of spontaneity, they often represent the obverse side of the mintage which they try to repudiate as false. A reaction against a particular mannerism is liable to produce its own mannerism in a militant fashion, using the toilet preparation of the war paint, deliberately manufactured style of primitive rudeness. Tired of the elaborately planned flower-beds, the gardener proceeds with grim determination to set up everywhere artificial rocks, avoiding natural inspiration of rhythm in deference to a fashion of tyranny which itself is a tyranny of fashion. The same herd instinct is followed in a cult of rebellion as it was in the cult of conformity and the defiance, which is a mere counteraction of obedience, also shows obedience in a defiant fashion. Fanaticism of virility produces a brawny athleticism meant for a circus and not the natural chivalry which is modest but invincible, claiming its sovereign seat of honour in all arts.

It has often been said by its advocates that this show of the rudely loud and cheaply lurid in art has its justification in the unbiased recognition of facts as such; and according to them realism must not be shunned even if it be ragged and evil-smelling. But when it does not concern science but concerns the arts we must draw a distinction between realism and reality. In its own wide perspective of normal environment, disease is a reality which has to be acknowledged in literature. But disease in a hospital is realism fit for the use of science. It is an abstraction which, if allowed to haunt literature, may assume a startling appearance because of its unreality. Such vagrant spectres do not have a proper modulation in a normal surrounding; and they offer a false proportion in their



feature because the proportion of their environment is tampered with. Such a curtailment of the essential is not art, but a trick which exploits mutilation in order to assert a false claim to reality. Unfortunately men are not rare who believe that what forcibly startles them allows them to see more than the facts which are balanced and restrained, which they have to woo and win. Very likely, owing to the lack of leisure, such persons are growing in number, and the dark cellars of sex-psychology and drug-stores of moral virulence are burgled to give them the stimulus which they wish to believe to be the stimulus of aesthetic reality.

I know a simple line sung by some primitive folk in our neighbourhood which I translate thus : "My heart is like a pebble-bed hiding a foolish stream." The psycho-analyst may classify it as an instance of repressed desire and thus at once degrade it to a mere specimen advertising a supposed fact, as it does a piece of coal suspected of having smuggled within its dark the flaming wine of the sun of a forgotten age. But it's literature; and whatever might have been the original stimulus that startled this thought into a song, the significant fact about it is that it has taken the shape of an image, a creation of a uniquely personal and yet universal character. The facts of the repression of a desire are numerous common ; but this particular expression is singularly uncommon. The listener's mind is touched not because it is a psychological fact, but because it is an individual poem, representing a personal reality, belonging to all time and place in the human world.

But this is not all. This poem no doubt owed its form to the touch of the person who produced it ; but at the same time with a gesture of utter detachment, it has transcended its material—the emotional mood of the author. It has gained its freedom from any biographical bondage by taking a rhythmic perfection which is precious in its own exclusive merit. There is a poem which confesses by its title its origin in a

mood of dejection. Nobody can say that to a lucid mind the feeling of despondency has anything pleasantly memorable. Yet these verses are not allowed to be forgotten, because directly a poem is fashioned, it is eternally freed from its genesis, it minimizes its history and emphasizes its independence. The sorrow which was solely personal in an emperor was liberated directly it took the form of verses in stone, it became a triumph of lament, an overflow of delight, hiding the black boulder of its suffering source. The same thing is true of all creation. A dewdrop is a perfect integrity that has no filial memory of its parentage.

When I use the word creation, I mean that through it some imponderable abstractions have assumed a concrete unity in its relation to us. Its substance can be analyzed but not this unity which is in its self-introduction. Literature as an art offers us the mystery which is in its unity.

We read the poem :

Never seek to tell thy love  
 Love that never told can be;  
 For the gentle wind does move  
 Silently, invisibly.  
 I told my love, I told my love,  
 I told all my heart;  
 Trembling cold in ghastly fears  
 Ah, she did depart.  
 Soon as she was gone from me  
 A traveller came by;  
 Silently, invisibly,  
 He took her with a sigh.

It has its grammar, its vocabulary. When we divide them part by part and try to torture out a confession from them, the poem which is *one* departs like the gentle wind, silently, invisibly. No one knows how it exceeds all its parts, transcends all its laws, and communicates with the person. The significance which is in unity is an eternal wonder.

As for the definite meaning of the poem, we may have our

doubts. If it were told in ordinary prose, we might feel impatient and be roused to contradict it. We would certainly have asked for an explanation as to who the traveller was and why he took away love without any reasonable provocation. But in this poem we need not ask for an explanation unless we are hopelessly addicted to meaning-collection which is like the collection mania for dead butterflies. The poem as a creation, which is something more than as an idea, inevitably conquers our attention ; and any meaning which we feel in its words is like the feeling in a beautiful face of a smile that is inscrutable, elusive and profoundly satisfactory.

The unity as a poem introduces itself in a rhythmic language in a gesture of character. Rhythm is not merely in some measured blending of words, but in a significant adjustment of ideas, in a music of thought produced by a subtle principle of distribution, which is not primarily logical but evidential. The meaning which the word character contains is difficult to define. It is comprehended in a special grouping of aspects which gives it an irresistible impetus. The combination it represents may be uncouth, may be unfinished, discordant ; yet it has a dynamic vigour in its totality which claims recognition, often against our wishes for the assent of our reason. An avalanche has a character, which even a heavier pile of snow has not ; its character is in its massive movement, its incalculable possibilities.

It is for the artist to remind the world that with the truth of our expression we grow in truth. When the man-made world is less an expression of man's creative soul than a mechanical device for some purpose of power, then it hardens itself, acquiring proficiency at the cost of the subtle suggestiveness of living growth. In his creative activities man makes Nature instinct with his own life and love. But with his utilitarian energies he fights Nature, banishes her from his world, deforms and defiles her with the ugliness of his ambitions.

This world of man's own manufacture, with its discordant shrieks and swagger, impresses on him the scheme of a universe which has no touch of the person and therefore no ultimate significance. All the great civilizations that have become extinct must have come to their end through such wrong expression of humanity; through parasitism on a gigantic scale bred by wealth, by man's clinging reliance on material resources; through a scoffing spirit of denial, of negation, robbing us of our means of sustenance in the path of truth.

It is for the artist to proclaim his faith in the everlasting YES—to say: "I believe that there is an ideal hovering over and permeating the earth, an ideal of that Paradise which is not the mere outcome of fancy, but the ultimate reality in which all things dwell and move."

I believe that the vision of Paradise is to be seen in the sunlight and the green of the earth, in the beauty of the human face and the wealth of human life, even in objects that are seemingly insignificant and unprepossessing. Everywhere on this earth the spirit of Paradise is awake and sending forth its voice. It reaches our inner ear without our knowing it. It tunes our harp of life which sends our aspiration in music beyond the finite, not only in prayers and hopes, but also in temples which are flames of fire in stone, in pictures which are dreams made everlasting, in the dance which is ecstatic meditation in the still centre of movement.

There come in our history occasions when the consciousness of a large multitude becomes suddenly illumined with the recognition of something which rises far above the triviality of daily happenings. Such an occasion there was when the voice of Buddha reached distant shores across all physical and moral impediments. Then our life and our world found their profound meaning of reality in their relation to the central person who offered us emancipation of love. And men, in order to make this great human experience ever memorable, determined to do the impossible : they made rocks to speak, stones to sing, caves to remember ; the cry of joy and hope took immortal forms, along hills and deserts, across barren solitudes and populous cities. A gigantic creative endeavour built up its triumph in stupendous carvings, defying obstacles that were overwhelming. Such heroic activity over the greater part of the Eastern continent clearly answers the question : *What is Art ?* —Art is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the real.

But the individual mind according to its temperament and training has its own recognition of reality in some of its special aspects. We can see from the Gandhara figures of Buddha that the artistic influence of Greece put its emphasis on the

scientific aspect, on anatomical accuracy, while the purely Indian mind dwelt on the symbolic aspect and tried to give expression to the soul of Buddha, never acknowledging the limitations of realism. To the adventurous spirit of the great European sculptor, Rodin, the most significant aspect of reality is the unceasing struggle of the incomplete for its freedom from the fetters of imperfection, whereas before the naturally introspective mind of the Eastern artist the real appears in its ideal form of fulfilment.

Therefore, when we talk of such a fact as Indian Art, it indicates some truth based upon the Indian tradition and temperament. At the same time we must know that there is no such thing as absolute caste restriction in human cultures; they ever have the power to combine and produce new variations, and such combinations have been going on for ages, proving the truth of the deep unity of human psychology. It is admitted that in Indian Art the Persian element found no obstacles, and there are signs of various other alien influences. China and Japan have no hesitation in acknowledging their debt to India in their artistic and spiritual growth of life. Fortunately for our civilisations, all such intermingling happened when professional art critics were not rampant and artists were not constantly nudged by the warning elbow of classifiers in their choice of inspiration. Our artists were never tiresomely reminded of the obvious fact that they were Indians; and in consequence they had the freedom to be naturally Indian in spite of all the borrowings that they indulged in.

A sign of greatness in great geniuses is their enormous capacity for borrowing, very often without their knowing it; they have unlimited credit in the world market of cultures. Only mediocrities are ashamed and afraid of borrowing, for they do not know how to pay back the debt in their own coin. Even the most foolish of critics does not dare blame

Shakespeare for what he openly appropriated from outside his own national inheritance. The human soul is proud of its comprehensive sensitiveness; it claims its freedom of entry everywhere when it is fully alive and awake. We congratulate ourselves on the fact, and consider it a sign of our being live in soul, that European thoughts and literary forms found immediate hospitality in Bengali literature from the very beginning of their contact with our mind. It ushered in a great revolution in the realm of our literary expression.

Enormous changes have taken place, but our Indian soul has survived the shock and has vigorously thriven upon this cataclysm. It only shows that though human mentality, like the earth's atmosphere, has undoubtedly different temperatures in different geographical zones, yet it is not walled up into impassable compartments and the circulation of the common air over the entire globe continues to have its wholesome effect. So let us take heart and make daring experiments, venture out into the open road in the face of all risks, go through experiences in the great world of human mind, defying unholy prohibitions preached by prudent little critics, laughing at them when in their tender solicitude for our safety they ask our artists to behave like good children and never to cross the threshold of their school-room.

Fearfully trying always to conform to a conventional type is a sign of immaturity. Only in babies is individuality of physiognomy blurred, and therefore personal distinction not strongly marked. Childishness as a mentality can easily be generalised: children's babbling has the same sound-tottering everywhere, their toys are very nearly similar. But adult age is difficult of classification, it is composed of individuals who claim recognition of their personal individuality which is shown not only in its own uniqueness of manner but also in its own special response to all stimulations from outside. I strongly urge our artists vehemently to deny their obliga-



tion to produce something that can be labelled as Indian Art, according to some old world mannerism. Let them proudly refuse to be herded into a pen like branded beasts that are treated as cattle and not as cows. Science is impersonal : it has its one aspect which is merely universal and therefore abstract; but art is personal and, therefore, through it the universal manifests itself in the guise of the individual, physiology expresses itself in physiognomy, philology in literature. Science is a passenger in a railway train of generalisation; their reasoning minds from all directions come to make their journey together in a similar conveyance. Art is a solitary pedestrian, who walks alone among the multitude, continually assimilating various experiences, unclassifiable and uncatalogued.

There was time when human races lived in comparative segregation and therefore the art adventurers had their experience within a narrow range of limits, along the deeply-cut grooves of certain common characteristics. But today that range has vastly widened, claiming from us a much greater power of receptivity than what we were compelled to cultivate in former ages. If today we have a living soul that is sensitive to ideas and to beauty of form, let it prove its capacity by accepting all that is worthy of acceptance, not according to some blind injunction of custom or fashion, but in following one's instinct for eternal value—the instinct which is a God-given gift to all real artists. Even then our art is sure to have a quality which is Indian, but it must be an inner quality and not an artificially fostered formalism ; and therefore not too obtrusively obvious, nor abnormally self-conscious.

When in the name of Indian Art we cultivate with deliberate aggressiveness a certain bigotry born of the habit of a past generation, we smother our soul under idiosyncrasies unearthed from buried centuries. These are like masks with



exaggerated grimaces that fail to respond to the ever changing play of life.

Art is not a gorgeous sepulchre, immovable brooding over a lonely eternity of vanished years. It belongs to the procession of life, making constant adjustment with surprises, exploring unknown shrines of reality along its path of pilgrimage to a future which is as different from the past as the tree from the seed. Art represents the inexhaustible magnificence of our creative spirit; it is generous in its acceptance and generous in its bestowal; it is unique in its manner and universal in its appeal; it is hospitable to the All because it has the wealth which is its own; its vision is new though its view may be old; it carries its special criterion of excellence within itself and therefore contemptuously refuses to be brow-beaten into conformity with a rhetoric manufactured by those who are not in the secret of the subtle mysteries of creation, who want to simplify through their academic code of law that which is absolutely simple through its spontaneity.

The art ideal of people may take fixed root in a narrow soil of tradition, developing a vegetable character, producing a monotonous type of leaves and flowers in a continuous round of repetitions. Because it is not disturbed by a mind which ever seeks the unattained and because it is held firm by a habit which piously discourages allurements of all adventure, it is neither helped by the growing life of the people nor does it help to enrich that life.

It remains confined to coteries of specialists who nourish it with delicate attention and feel proud of the ancient flavour of its aristocratic exclusiveness. It is not a stream that flows through and fertilises the soil, but a rare wine stored in a dark cellar underground, acquiring a special stimulation through its artificially nurtured, barren antiquity. In exchange for a freedom of movement which is the prerogative of vigorous youth, we may gain a static perfection of senility that has minted its

wisdom into hard and rounded maxims. Unfortunately, there are those who believe it an advantage for a child to be able to borrow its grandparents' age and be spared the trouble and risk of growing and think that it is a sign of wealthy respectability for an artist lazily to cultivate a monotonously easy success by means of some hoarded patrimony of tradition.

The genesis of all art traditions must have been in some gestures in the modes and mediums of expression that spontaneously came to men of genius and were followed by others whose admiration naturally pursued the path of imitation. In poetic literature it is our common experience to find that striking phrases and suggestive mannerisms, originating from the writings of some popularly accepted poet, spread fast in a soil of susceptible mentality. However, if the literature has any vitality it is cured of that infection before it develops a poison that is fatal. The malady takes a chronic persistence when it finds its breeding place in an inert period of mental degeneracy. When something in art, which is too peculiar in its presentment, shows an incorrigible tendency to repeat itself we may be sure that it is a sign of the waning life. If it is a fact that some standard of invariable formalism has for ages been following the course of the arts in India, making it possible for them to be classified as specially Indian, then it must be confessed that the creative mind which inevitably breaks out in individual variations has lain dead or dormant for those torpid centuries. All traditional structures of art must have sufficient degree of elasticity to allow it to respond to varied impulses of life, delicate or virile; to grow with its growth, to dance with its rhythm. There are traditions which, in alliance with rigid prescriptions of rhetoric, establish their slave dynasty, dethroning their master, the Life-urge, that revels in endless freedom of expression. This is a tragedy whose outrage we realise in the latter-day Sanskrit literature

and in the conventional arts and crafts of India, where mind is helplessly driven by a blind ghost of the past.

And yet we may go too far if we altogether reject tradition in the cultivation of the arts, and it is an incomplete statement of truth to say that habits have the sole effect of deadening our mind. The tradition which is helpful is like a channel that helps the current to flow. It is open where the water runs onward, guarding it only where there is danger in deviation. The bee's life in its channel of habit has no opening ; it revolves within a narrow circle of perfection. Man's life has time-honoured institutions which are its organised habits. When these act as enclosures, then the result may be perfect, like a bee-hive of wonderful precision of form, but unsuitable for the mind which has unlimited possibilities of progress.

From a lecture delivered in Dacca.

After lunch the Poet said : "The talk I had with Nandalal the other day about art-inspiration, is worth pondering upon."

"The ritualistic practices of the Vedic times with their typical hymns of worship had but one aim—to reach some desired objective. It is a kind of commercialisation of religion. Greed for material things can hardly promote good relationship between man and his neighbour. One cannot share the object of one's desire with others. Probably that is why in the Vedic times there was no great difference made between the fruits of merit and fruits of gain. Both could be bought or bartered for cattle and gold.

"Buddhism helped men to come together because its aim was deliverance from material things of life rather than indulgence in them. It was like a call to salvation to which millions responded readily.

"In slumber, we are separate from one another. Hedged around by our isolation, we merely exist but do not live consciously when asleep. To know oneself as part of the world-self, is true knowledge. We notice, therefore, that in the Buddhist era when man came to know himself in the clear and strong light of a countrywide re-awakening, he wished to

express himself in a spirit of glorious abandon. The arts and crafts of that age bear ample proof of that creative urge of self-expression.

"When Christianity was a live and dynamic force in the West, religion inspired a similar upsurge of the creative arts. That is too well-known a fact of history to need repetition. The Bhakti cult of the Puranic times in our own country was a similar cementing force. Thousands rallied to its call of unity and out of this fellowship of hearts there was a widespread attempt made at self-expression which burst forth in sculpture, painting and lyrical poetry."

Dilip Kumar interposed: "All that you say are no doubt facts of history. What is important is to know the reasons why."

Said the Poet: "When a reader feels particularly interested in some passage of a book, he underlines it. Although the words are not his own, he feels a kind of proprietary right to them by the intensity of his realisation of their meaning. And he wishes to mark them out for all times. That kind of underlining or marking out may be called Art. What is the point of difference between all the innumerable things lying scattered in the wide world and the few that flash upon our particular world of consciousness? The contrast is as between the two faces of the moon—the one that smiles at the earth and other that has its face turned away. It is this beaming face of the moon with which the world of songs and festive joy is concerned. Similarly, such portions of this world of God's creation which our soul's light irradiates, we claim them as our own by creating them anew in line and colour, poetry and song. There may not be anything extraordinary in the bridegroom, he may not be strikingly different from the others. But when he comes to wed, we do not fail to proclaim his worth in that particular setting. We do it with music and illumination. To the bride's household he is

worthier than kings and princes, in the same way as the child is precious to its mother. In either case the value is of the mind and not of the market—it is a value that our heart accepts rather than our purse.

“Nandalal’s query is : what exactly does the spirit of the time demand of the artist and the man of letters today? In the golden age of Buddhism or Christianity the call was universal, it embraced every department of life. There was unity and harmony between creative inspiration and the work of creation itself. Is there any such concurrence between the call and its response, in our work?

“Before we deal with that question, let us first decide what is the most significant message of our times.

“I have said already, pursuit of material things does not work for unity. Sankaracharya warns: *Artham anartham bhāvaya nityam* : constantly consider material wealth to be a source of evil. Money is not the means wherewith to unravel the meaning of the human soul or of the universe around us. The world today teems with the ulcerous growth of huge management corporations. But these gigantic organizations with their highly mechanised commerce and industries, tend everywhere to paralyse our aesthetic sense and waste away our creative talents. Money is merely a convenience in our dealings with the world outside. It is not a wealth of the mind. The rich man rides an automobile to reach the temple of the Lord. The value of the motor-car as a means of locomotion does not make of it a vehicle of *Bhakti*. That is why an automobile as an article of property cannot contribute an element of beauty to the act of worship. Fundamentally, the most important message of our times is the levelling of human rights in so far as opportunities are concerned. There is a natural difference of abilities between one man and another. This difference is the measure of a man’s achievement, of his failures as much as of his successes. But there is equality of opportunity for all

whatever the goal—money or knowledge or deed. Buddhism opened wide this very highway of equal opportunity—only it did not aim at reaching the pragmatist's paradise but the heaven of *moksha*, salvation. The important thing is that today there is nothing to debar the hope that what one has achieved the other might attain too. It is this possibility which gives man his human worth and dignity. Injustice cannot go unchallenged today: a man has his right to go to the court of law; what was a question of favour in the past, has today become a matter of right. If law discriminates, we can take courage today to call it wrong. Not that our call becomes effective every time, but no matter how small we may be, even such as we can call Law to question. There is also that wealth of knowledge, the knowledge of Science in the pursuit of which there can be no discrimination between one man and another. It is not only that the pursuit of Science is open to all—its field of enquiry also is vast and extends everywhere. The concepts of Science do not observe any distinction of caste or status. Even the meanest and the most barbarous of men is a subject of interest to the science of Biology. Man's mind has today domain over the whole world in consequence of his quest of knowledge and more knowledge. If one has the power and the ability each one of us can lay claim to this sovereignty of Science.

"Abilities differ from one man to another. We are born with varying powers of the mind. But our inequality is not made obvious on the surface. There, all of us have equal opportunities, and, if there be discrepancy in a particular instance, it is suffered as a wrong against which man can raise his voice of protest, in the court of humanity.

"Scientific curiosity has for its goal the unravelling of the meaning and mystery of the world, of Nature and Man. This curiosity is detached, impartial, impersonal. Unlike our scriptures it makes no distinction between the dog and the



brahmin and the untouchable. Scientific knowledge may have some affinity with the conception of unity of creation which the metaphysicians teach. But it can have no kinship with our aesthetic sense. Scientific knowledge is abstract, aesthetic knowledge is subjective. Science says : 'I know', Art says : 'I perceive'. All our pictures, images, songs and poetry, say the one and the same thing : 'I perceive'. The last lines of a song of mine run thus :

let me go and see the smile of his face,  
let me go and offer him my garland of flowers,  
let me go and tell him that his flute plays music in my heart.

The Artist, too, says the same thing and offers the same garland of flowers. He has the task on behalf of us all to garnish and bedeck the offering that man brings to the shrine of Beauty.

"But the ability to register impressions may contract or expand. We see ample proof that man's perception has extended its horizons in many a direction these days. There was a time when man's mind was preoccupied with gods and goddesses, demons and devils, kings and sages, heroes and warriors. The humdrum life of the common mass of man had no appeal to him. Today every man, in his own right claims attention, not because he has talent or learning, wealth or position, but because he belongs to the human race. The representative artist of our times notices a lot of things happening around him and registers their impressions.

"When in China I had a Chinese poet for my friend and companion. He would nudge at me excitedly as we journeyed in a car and shout : 'Look there goes a donkey.' Not that the donkey has any special point of beauty or merit. But by its very existence, a living creature made such an impact on his mind, that he must needs feel excited about it. If he were an artist he would surely have brought his excited awareness of



it to bear upon his picture of the donkey. And he would depict it not because the donkey was a ravishing teen-ager or a pious sage, but because it was merely a donkey which had hit his eye and mind. The man of Science with his objective outlook would remain satisfied with a photographic image of the donkey—but not so the artist. He must draw or paint it in the light of what impression the donkey makes on his mind. The photograph shows the donkey but gives no idea of the mind of the scientist. In the picture the donkey reflects the impression it makes on the mind of the artist. It ceases to be a data and becomes an object of affection.

“In the world of today this loving concern of the artist embraces the big and the small, the near and the distinct. There is a kind of concern which is dependent on such extraneous factors as birth and lineage, wealth and position, face and figure. But this love of the artist is a far nobler thing—it is love for a thing simply because it exists. This idea is so valuable that many modern artists deliberately discard the concept of the Good and the Beautiful from their mind and art-expression, lest people may blunder into thinking that they cannot see the True unless some kind of inducement is offered them, that rather than showing unalloyed respect and recognition to pure existence they wish to allure the mind.

I remember I once went to call in a specialist, a missionary doctor to treat an ailing relation. He met my request with the remark that he did not attend the rich, or in other words, he did not enter a wealthy household lest people accused him of deferring to money or position. Even when there was real distress in the rich man's household, he would not visit it medically, oblivious of the fact that the rich are as human as the poorest of man. Once a schoolgirl asked me how much was five times three. I said : fortyfive. The little lady curled up her nose with contempt at my lack of arithmetic. I argued in defence that if three lean and thin fives made fifteen, it was

just not possible that three fat ones would add up to the same total. The girl silenced me by pointing out that the unit of calculation was the same however thin or fat the figures might be. My answer to the querulous modern artist is the same : "If art is concerned with existence, we must not shut our eyes to the existence of Beauty."

Translated by Kshitish Roy from the Bengali article *Alapalocana* being the report of a discussion Rabindranath Tagore had with Dilip Kumar Ray and Nandalal Bose.

The fundamental desire of life is the desire to exist. It claims from us a vast amount of training and experience about the necessities of livelihood. Yet it does not cost me much to confess that the food that I have taken, the dress that I wear, the house where I have my lodging, represent a stupendous knowledge, practice and organization which I helplessly lack; for I find that I am not altogether despised for such ignorance and inefficiency. Those who read me seem fairly satisfied that I am nothing better than poet or perhaps a philosopher—which latter reputation I do not claim and dare not hold through the precarious help of misinformation.

It is quite evident in spite of my deficiency that in human society I represent a vocation, which though superfluous has yet been held worthy of commendation. In fact, I am encouraged in my rhythmic futility by being offered moral and material incentives for its cultivation. If a foolish blackbird did not know how to seek its food, to build its nest, or to avoid its enemies, but specialized in singing, its fellow creatures, urged by their own science of genetics, would dutifully allow it to starve and perish. That I am not treated in a similar fashion is the evidence of an immense difference between animal existence and the civilization of man. His great

distinction dwells in the indefinite margin of life in him which affords a boundless background for his dreams and creations. And it is in this realm of freedom that he realizes his divine dignity, his great human truth, and is pleased when I as a poet sing victory to him, to Man the self-revealer, who goes on exploring ages of creation to find himself in perfection.

Reality, in all its manifestations, reveals itself in the emotional and imaginative background of our mind. We know it, not because we can think of it, but because we directly feel it. And therefore, even if rejected by the logical mind, it is not banished from our consciousness. As an incident it may be beneficial or injurious, but as revelation its value lies in the fact that it offers us an experience through emotion or imagination ; we feel ourselves in a special field of realization. This feeling itself is delightful when it is not accompanied by any great physical or moral risk ; we love to feel even fear or sorrow if it is detached from all practical consequences. This is the reason of our enjoyment of tragic dramas, in which the feeling of pain rouses our consciousness to a white heat of intensity.

The reality of my own self is immediate and indubitable to me. Whatever else affects me in a like manner is real for myself, and it inevitably attracts and occupies my attention for its own sake, blends itself with my personality, making it richer and larger and causing it delight. My friend may not be beautiful, useful, rich or great, but he is real to me ; in him I feel my own extension and my joy.

The consciousness of the real within me seeks for its own corroboration the touch of the Real outside me. When it fails the self in me is depressed. When our surroundings are monotonous and insignificant, having no emotional reaction upon our mind, we become vague to ourselves. For we are like pictures, whose reality is helped by the background if it is sympathetic. The punishment we suffer in solitary confine-

ment consists in the obstruction to the relationship between the world of reality and the real in ourselves, causing the latter to become indistinct in a haze of inactive imagination: our personality is blurred, we miss the companionship of our own being through the diminution of our self. The world of our knowledge is enlarged for us through the extension of our information; the world of our personality grows in its area with a large and deeper experience of our personal self in our own universe through sympathy and imagination.

As this world, that can be known through knowledge, is limited to us owing to our ignorance, so the world of personality, that can be realized by our own personal self, is also restricted by the limit of our sympathy and imagination. In the dim twilight of insensitiveness a large part of our world remains to us like a procession of nomadic shadows. According to the stages of our consciousness we have more or less been able to identify ourselves with this world, if not as a whole, at least in fragments, and our enjoyment dwells in that wherein we feel ourselves thus united. In art we express the delight of this unity by which this world is realized as humanly significant to us. I have my physical, chemical and biological self; my knowledge of it extends through the extension of my knowledge of the physical, chemical and biological world. I have my personal self, which has its communication with our feelings, sentiments and imaginations, which lends itself to be coloured by our desires and shaped by our imageries.

Science urges us to occupy by our mind the immensity of the knowable world; our spiritual teacher enjoins us to comprehend by our soul the infinite Spirit which is in the depth of the moving and changing facts of the world; the urging of our artistic nature is to realize the manifestation of personality in the world of appearance, the reality of existence which is in harmony with the real within us. Where this harmony is not deeply felt, there we are aliens and perpetually homesick.

For man by nature is an artist ; he never receives passively and accurately in his mind physical representation of things around him. There goes on a continual adaptation, a transformation of facts into human imagery, through constant touches of his sentiments and imagination. The animal has the geography of its birthplace ; man has his country, the geography of his personal self. The vision of it is not merely physical ; it has its artistic unity, it is a perpetual creation. In his country, his consciousness being unobstructed, man extends his relationship, which is of his own creative personality. In order to live efficiently man must know facts and their laws. In order to be happy he must establish harmonious relationship with all things with which he has dealings. Our creation is the modification of relationship.

The great men who appear in our history remain in our mind not as a static fact but as a living historical image. The sublime suggestions of their lives become blended into a noble consistency in legends made living in the life of ages. Those men with whom we live we constantly modify in our minds, making them more real to us than they would be in a bare presentation. Men's ideal of womanhood and women's ideal of manliness are created by the imagination through a mental grouping of qualities and conducts according to our hopes and desires, and men and women consciously and unconsciously strive towards its attainment. In fact, they reach a degree of reality for each other according to their success in adapting these respective ideals to their own nature. To say that these ideals are imaginary and therefore not true is wrong in man's case. His true life is in his own creation, which represents the infinity of man. He is naturally indifferent to things that merely exist ; they must have some ideal value for him, and then only his consciousness fully recognizes them as real. Men are never true in their isolated self, and their imagination

is the faculty that brings before their mind the vision of their own greater being.

We can make truth ours by actively modulating its inter-relations. This is the work of art ; for reality is not based in the substance of things but in the principle of relationship. Truth is the infinite pursued by metaphysics ; fact is the infinite pursued by science, while reality is the definition of the infinite which relates truth to the person. Reality is human ; it is what we are conscious of, by which we are affected, that which we express. When we are intensely aware of it, we are aware of ourselves and it gives us delight. We live in it, we always widen its limits. Our arts and literature represent this creative activity which is fundamental in man.

But the mysterious fact about it is that though the individuals are separately seeking their expression, their success is never individualistic in character. Men must find and feel and represent in all their creative works Man the Eternal, the creator. Their civilization is a continual discovery of the transcendental humanity. In whatever it fails it shows the failure of the artist, which is the failure in expression ; and that civilization perishes in which the individual thwarts the revelation of the universal. For Reality is the truth of Man, who belongs to all times, and any individualistic madness of men against Man cannot thrive for long.

Man is eager that his feeling for what is real to him must never die ; it must find an imperishable form. The consciousness of this self of mine is so intensely evident to me that it assumes the character of immortality. I cannot imagine that it ever has been or can be non-existent. In a similar manner all things that are real to me are for myself eternal, and therefore worthy of a language that has a permanent meaning. We know individuals who have the habit of inscribing their names on the walls of some majestic monument of architecture. It is a pathetic way of associating their own names with some works



of art which belong to all times and to all men. Our hunger for reputation comes from our desire to make objectively real that which is inwardly real to us. He who is inarticulate is insignificant, like a dark star that cannot prove itself. He ever waits for the artist to give him his fullest worth, not for anything specially excellent in him but for the wonderful fact that he is what he certainly is, that he carries in him the eternal mystery of being.

In the Upanishad it is said in a parable that there are two birds sitting on the same bough, one of which feeds and the other looks on. This is an image of the mutual relationship of the infinite being and the finite self. The delight of the bird which looks on is great, for it is a pure and free delight. There are both of these birds in man himself, the objective one with its business of life, the subjective one with its disinterested joy of vision.

A child comes to me and commands me to tell her a story. I tell her of a tiger which is disgusted with the black stripes on its body and comes to my frightened servant demanding a piece of soap. The story gives my little audience immense pleasure, the pleasure of a vision, and her mind cries out, "It is here, for I see !" She knows a tiger in the book of natural history, but she can see the tiger in the story of mine.

I am sure that even this child of five knows that it is an impossible tiger that is out on its untigerly quest of an absurd soap. The delightfulness of the tiger for her is not in its beauty, its usefulness, or its probability ; but in the undoubted fact that she can see it in her mind with a greater clearness of vision than she can the walls around her—the walls that brutally shout their evidence of certainty which is merely circumstantial. The tiger in the story is inevitable, it has the character of a complete image, which offers its testimonial of truth in itself. The listener's own mind is the eye-witness, whose direct experience could not be contradicted. A tiger



must be like every other tiger in order that it may have its place in a book of Science ; there it must be a commonplace tiger to be at all tolerated. But in the story it is uncommon, it can never be reduplicated. We *know* a thing because it belongs to a class ; we *see* a thing because it belongs to itself. The tiger of the story completely detached itself from all others of its kind and easily assumed a distinct individuality in the heart of the listener. The child could vividly see it, because by the help of her imagination it became her own tiger, one with herself, and this union of the subject and object gives us joy. Is it because there is no separation between them in truth, the separation being the *maya*, which is creation ?

Once there came a time, centuries ago in Bengal, when the divine love drama that has made its eternal playground in human souls was vividly revealed by a personality radiating its intimate realization of God. The mind of a whole people was stirred by a vision of the world as an instrument, through which sounded out invitation to the meeting of bliss. The ineffable mystery of God's love-call, taking shape in an endless panorama of colours and forms, inspired activity in music that overflowed the restrictions of classical conventionalism. Our Kirtan music of Bengal came to its being like a star flung up by a burning whirlpool of emotion in the heart of a whole people, and their consciousness was aflame with a sense of reality that must be adequately acknowledged.

The question may be asked as to what place music occupies in my theory that art is for evoking in our mind the deep sense of reality in its richest aspect. Music is the most abstract of all the arts, as mathematics is in the region of science. In fact these two have a deep relationship with each other. Mathematics is the logic of numbers and dimensions. It is therefore employed as the basis of our scientific knowledge. When taken out of its concrete associations and reduced to symbols, it reveals its grand structural majesty, the inevitable-

ness of its own perfect concord. Yet there is not merely a logic but also a magic of mathematics which works at the world of appearance, producing harmony—the cadence of inter-relationship. This rhythm of harmony has been extracted from its usual concrete context, and exhibited through the medium of sound. And thus the pure essence of expressiveness in existence is offered in music. Expressiveness finds the least resistance in sound, having freedom unencumbered by the burden of facts and thoughts. This gives it a power to arouse in us an intimate feeling of reality. In the pictorial, plastic and literary arts, the object and our feelings with regard to it are closely associated, like the rose and its perfumes. In music, the feeling distilled in sound becomes itself an independent object. It assumes a tune-form which is definite, but a meaning which is undefinable, and yet which grips our mind with a sense of absolute truth.

It is the magic of mathematics, the rhythm which is in the heart of all creation, which moves in the atom and, in its different measures, fashions gold and lead, the rose and the thorn, the sun and the planets. These are the dance-steps of numbers in the arena of time and space, which weave the *maya*, the patterns of appearance, the incessant flow of change, that ever is and is not. It is the rhythm that churns up images from the vague and makes tangible what is elusive. This is *maya*, this is the art in creation, and art in literature, which is the magic of rhythm.

And must we stop here? What we know as intellectual truth, is that also not a rhythm of the relationship of facts, that weaves the pattern of theory, and produces a sense of convincingness to a person who somehow feels sure that he knows the truth? We believe any fact to be true because of a harmony, a rhythm in reason, the process of which is analysable by the logic of mathematics, but not its result in me, just as we can count the notes but cannot account for the music.

The mystery is that I am convinced, and this also belongs to the *maya* of creation, whose one important, indispensable factor is this self-conscious personality that I represent.

And the Other ? I believe it is also a self-conscious personality, which has its eternal harmony with mine.

From a lecture delivered in Oxford.

The world which man has created for himself has many aspects. At the root of its multiple activity, man's worship and ritual, his endeavour to acquire knowledge and his economic striving, there lies a single impulse, the impulse to relate himself to the universe at large by means of his mind, his consciousness, his character. The most apparent of these connections is the bond of necessity. Provision is made in the universe for many kinds of things and man has many needs. Out of the conjunction of these two factors our vast material world has taken shape in countries and epochs. Under the pressure of necessity man exerts himself untiringly, with unremitting enterprise, making many experiments, waging many battles. In this he is like other living creatures. The difference is that the scope of the efforts made by other creatures is limited whereas man's range is unlimited. I also find that necessity generally drives other creatures to exert themselves individually ; it does not unite them. Man's strength lies in the fact that, even under the pressure of necessity, his social consciousness asserts itself. Bees and ants unite up to a point but this unity is automatic and ineffective outside very narrow limits. Even where man has accepted automatisation to some extent, his social intelligence, the inspiration he derives from his sense of

unity with the whole, is consistently triumphant. Beasts live within a small compass. We have to live on a large scale. Human society claims a constantly expanding field of activity.

Necessity is not the only way in which we are connected with the universe at large. Man wants to know. The demands of his livelihood have flung a worldwide net. Man drains the natural world for raw materials and wealth. Other demands, united by the urge to know, combine to subject the outer world to a searching scrutiny. Nothing is spared. Beasts also have need of knowledge. They must change their ways with the changing seasons. They must distinguish between enemies and friends. They must know where and how to obtain food. And they must, in the interests of effective self-preservation, be constantly on guard. But in these matters also their range is restricted. From time immemorial they have moved within the narrow limits of unalterable laws and are unable to transcend them. But joining himself to the universe through knowledge man makes the acquaintance of his own inner being, a being that is in continual growth. His knowledge is unlimited and through it he discovers himself. Knowledge is power, says an English adage. It is true. Yet the urge to know for the sake of knowing is innate. What knowledge brings is secondary. Knowledge is, however, constantly linked with necessity. Night after night the Chaldean shepherd lay in the pasture and studied the night sky, impelled by a desire to know something about the stars. The knowledge had no relation whatsoever to his work as a shepherd. But the more he learned about the stars the easier it became for him to determine direction in the dark. A time came when, because of this knowledge, ships could make their way to harbour across unposted sea.

Man is related to the universe in another way also, by a bond which is not the bond either of necessity nor of knowledge. This is the relationship established through

the creation of beauty. It is this which I wish to discuss today. Here we discover the fundamental tenet of art. Art does not mean pictorial representation only but all the various creative efforts man makes.

When I contemplate man's world I cannot but be amazed at the extent of his unceasing creativity. Its products have been treasured down the ages. Making use of a great variety of symbols and of materials, wood, stone, gold, ivory, in painting, in sculpture, in words and in music this urge to create has been so strong that it is difficult to measure the abundance it has provided in literature and art and other artistic disciplines. Where is the source of the great stream of formative energy man has released in words, in lines, in melodies? From whence does it derive its driving power? We find, from the very earliest times, that man was irresistibly impelled to express his sense and perception of beauty on cave walls and in stone. He drew the animals he hunted. He even decorated the weapon with which he killed, making it beautiful. Were the needs of self-preservation all in all to him then? Man was forced to struggle and fight unceasingly, but in the midst of the insecurity and turmoil of his life he decorated his water jar and found time to paint designs around the door of his cave. He did not regard the world as taken up entirely with necessity. Something had touched him which was beyond his immediate material need.

I shall call this extra exertion of man's consciousness, an exertion beyond material necessity and beyond the demands of knowledge, the inspiration of man's will. We make use of the universe, we know the universe and we also will the universe, that is to say, we wish to enjoy it, partake of its essence. The experience which we enjoy is an immediate, emotional and intuitive realisation. It is not an item of information but a matter of feeling, something self-evident. No ethical deliberation or logical argument is required to make me like a

flower. Thought and judgement are unnecessary. To experience a flower is, actually, to experience myself in a particular way. To immerse myself in a particular mode or sensation of beauty is to know myself through it. The rose intensifies this sensation in the joy it evokes and the inner being responds by growth. We rejoice in our surroundings when they awaken our sense of being. What is hidden, veiled in the shadow of unfamiliarity, gives no pleasure. My consciousness of being does not respond vigorously and my awareness is blunted and obscured. The greatest punishment that can be inflicted upon a man is, for this reason, solitary confinement. Every comfort may be provided for him in matters of food and rest. But, in the absence of all those external things through contact with which man realises himself in various ways, his sense of being grows numb and flaccid. This is living death. The core of the matter is that man wants to realise himself fully and when the colours of his life fade his being is blurred. Consider painting. Given an appropriate background the character of the work is created by the conjunction of idea and form. The space around it does not cast a shadowy mirage of inarticulateness upon it. In the lightlessness of unawakened being man lies in a state of depression. For man is deeply attracted to that which promotes in him the luminous joy of being.

This is our hunger for emotional experience, for self-unfoldment. It is not the hunger for food, nor the hunger for knowledge. It is the impulse to lift ourselves out of the nothingness of the unmanifest and heighten our consciousness. I am not speaking of this desire for self-awareness in a spiritual sense. It is only the urge to know oneself more clearly which is in each of us. Not all have the ability to intensify it to the point of illumination but in the effort to do so, art has its origin.

This awareness of self which we seek is always joy-giving.

All emotional experiences are, I say, joyous for man. I do not omit any, neither sorrow, nor pain, nor fear. Take the experience of fear. When is it productive of unhappiness? Where personal loss or harm is associated with it. When a tiger enters a village people grow anxious. But suppose I read a story about a tiger, about a hunter's thrilling game with death. Why should I read it at all if the terrifying experience through which the story takes me is not enjoyable? It is the same with ghost stories. And why do we invite and pay traditional storytellers to come and tell us the story of Sita's forest exile? If a murder takes place next door we, apprehending danger, summon the police but when Othello takes the life of Desdemona we do not risk any personal injury. The keenness of the pain we then experience floods our whole consciousness with the fierce light of our feeling. The play *Hamlet* moves to completion through the agony of the deepest despair. Would our enjoyment be enhanced if the number of tragic incidents in the play was decreased and comfortable, comic episodes substituted for them! The hero brings about fearful and perilous situations and strives to triumph over them. He is not afraid of consequences. He advances through the fullness of his emotional experience. So hard is the shell of the timid, encased in their personal fears, that they do not know how to flood their consciousness with the waves of strong and vital feeling when a crisis assails them. They sit on their porches in terror of scriptures and witches. Man's hunger for emotional experience of many kinds propels him forward in a multiform universe. This heroic progress does not come to a successful conclusion in the lives of all. It is for this reason that we take so much pleasure in drinking deeply of other men's experiences through literature and art.

How man's sense of the real gains in power is a mystery. The heart never becomes indifferent to a rose. We do not even look at bits of gravel. Why? I shall not discuss this



today. What I wish to say today is that we are related to the universe in three ways, by necessity, by knowledge and also by a pure emotional and intuitional union with it. Our kinship is established through the last. Whenever this feeling of kinship, this sense of unity, of oneness with the outer world is evoked in me I am overjoyed. A rose fills me with joy for in a rose my consciousness finds nourishment and satisfaction. The sight of a kerosene tin does not delight but the sight of an earthen water jar does. The difference between them from the point of view of convenience in drawing water is, for me, of minor importance. We seek the Man in the Heart, *maner Manush*, and not only this Man but the Man after our Heart. The Man who is to our liking is to be found in the world of visual beauty and in the world of poetry. It is there that man's being rejoices most deeply. It is for this reason that we venerate the one who shapes. We have more regard for the potter who fashions a water jar than for one who carries water in it. The man who shapes brings the real very close to us, throwing light upon our awareness of the reality within man. The real lies scattered about in many diverse objects. I cannot see it in its pure unfragmented state immediately. In artistic creation the real stands before us in all its immediacy. I can behold its form. Art awakens a sense of the real by establishing an intimate relationship between our inner being and the universe at large, bringing us a consciousness of deep joy.

Notes of a lecture given extempore in Bengali at the Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan

Translated by Lila Ray.

MY MISTRESS OF THE LINE    11 September 1938

The tree pursues a purpose  
In its flowers and fruits,  
But never at all in the hieroglyph  
Limned on its chequered shade  
Where butterflies imitate  
The flitting of the yellow leaves  
And a swarm of lines and curves quiver on the grass.

My Mistress of Speech in the pride of her rich inheritance  
Rules with a rod.  
She rarely allows wild vagaries of the wayward ;  
But the Line smiles at my extravagance  
And never raises her warning finger at the foolish.  
Thus I fear not to widen gaps between my tasks  
Through which to run out to the boundless realm of the  
    Inconsequential  
And to litter my time with an irrelevant caprice of forms.

Fondly indulgent is my Mistress of the Line to the errant  
    in the poet  
Whose truancy is not to be checked  
By the curbing rein of reputation,

For his proud name, acclaimed by the market  
Ignores the painter's brush  
Leaving it free to follow its path,  
Free as is the Spring with his paint-box.



















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## LETTER

7 November 1928

I am hopelessly entangled in the spell that the lines have cast all around me. The muse of poetry has left these quarters for good and all, peeved by my favouritism towards the *inconnu*—although I am past the age of indiscretion. I have almost managed to forget that there was a time when I used to write poetry. It is the element of unpredictability in art which seems to fascinate me strongly. The subject matter of a poem can be traced back to some dim thought in the mind. Once it leaves the matted crown of Siva, the stream of poetry flows along its measured course—well-defined by its two banks. While painting, the process adopted by me is quite the reverse. First, there is the hint of a line, then the line becomes a form. The more pronounced the form becomes the clearer becomes the picture to my conception. This creation of form is a source of endless wonder. If I were a finished artist I would probably have a preconceived idea to be made into a picture. This is no doubt a rewarding experience. But it is greater fun when the mind is seized upon by something outside of it, some surprise element which gradually evolves into an understandable shape. I am so taken with this new game that all my various responsibilities, extraneous to myself, peep in from outside my door only to withdraw the next moment with much

shaking of the head. If I were a free agent as of yore, unburdened by any cares, do you realise what I would have done? I would live by the Padma and gather a harvest of pictures and nothing but pictures to load the Golden Boat of Time with.

Written to Rani Mahalanobis.  
Translated by Kshitis Roy.

At the present time I wander about with my eyes open in the world of form where lines crowd upon lines. As I watch the trees, I seem to see so much of them. It is borne on me that this visible world is a vast procession of forms. My artist's pen wishes to recapture this play of forms—not in any emotional, sentimental or intellectual manner, but purely for the sake of assembling different forms together. And strangely enough this has become a source of great joy to me. Almost intoxicating. These days the lines have got the better of me. There is no escaping them. Every day they are revealing themselves anew in ever new shapes and attitudes. There is no end to this mystery. At last I have come to know the mind of the Creator who is himself an artist. Infinite and ineffable himself, he delights in drawing lines upon lines to set a limit to himself. Limited in space they are unlimited in diversity. Nor should we forget that it is definition which makes for perfection. When the measureless finds its own measure—it realises itself. The joy in a picture is a joy of a perfect sense of proportion. The restraint of lines makes the picture distinct and definite. To see it is to see the thing itself—whatever it may be, a piece of stone, a donkey, a cactus, an old woman—it does not matter what. Whenever and

wherever we envision a thing as true we touch the infinite and  
that is an endless joy.

Written to Rani Mahalanobis.  
Translated by Kshitis Rôy.

A greater part of my early years was spent in observing the world of nature. It gave me intense joy to watch things. I would sit quietly by the window, or climb on a packing-box to peep over the wall of our balcony to feast my eyes upon a host of things—the early morning sun touching the top of a row of coconut palms, the drove of ducks diving in and out of the water of the tank, the deep blue grandeur of the rain-laden clouds rising suddenly from behind the balcony, the walls of varied sizes of a neighbouring house, across the lane looking mysterious in moonlight, the low sheds where lived the milkmen with their cattle beyond the walls of the inner apartments, the sun glistening on a shallow pool of water where the buffaloes bathed, the deep green of an avenue of trees that stood atop a long line of roofs of assorted heights to the east—all of them seemed to fascinate me. The first idea that came the instant I left my bed was that there was no end of things to see.

I was a lonely child, I had no friends to play with. But I had this great big visible world to keep me company. I could almost imagine this world outside to be a lonely child like me—sitting by the great big window of the sky, looking towards the distant horizon.



Thereafter I passed on from this world of forms to the folklore world of human relations. It was like the old story of Prince Charming and all that. From the world of pure observation I got transported to the world of feeling : there was no clear light of reason to guide me here, only vague emotions and sentiments. My existence became a chiaroscuro of light and shade—a nebulous round of seeking and finding and losing. This was the time when music came to me and a kind of filmy miasma obscured my former world of vision.

Thereafter came the awakening of my mind and I gave myself up to the task of expressing myself in thought and action. Duty made heavy demands on my leisure. And so it went on for a good long time and I remained harnessed interminably.

Meanwhile the twilight dust of weariness descends with the waning of vitality. I wanted to give myself a holiday and a kind of recreation that would fill in my respite lest my holidays hung heavy with the weight of boredom. It was at this pass that through some loophole in my activities, entered this passionate desire to paint and to draw. That was in way a return to that world of pure visible form—the only difference being that formerly the game was passive and receptive whereas it now became active and dynamic. The movement was no more inwards from outside but outwards from inside. Like a boy I began fashioning my own playthings of form—drawing or painting.

It is immaterial whether these creations are good or bad. What is important is that some form has emerged out of these lines and colours. What if they do not have any definite purpose. I do not expect in the least that they will bring me reward and renown ; on the contrary, I have an apprehension that my countrymen would fasten their critical tooth into them. It would perhaps be safer for me to secrete them away from prying eyes.

Nevertheless, this intoxication with the game of inventing forms persists. It makes me forget my duties and obligations to such an extent that all else seems useless waste of time. Thus my mind has turned the full cycle and come back to those irresponsible early days when my eyes were hungry for the world of form and I was a mere boy absorbed in his play-things. That is why the other day I spent the idle hours of a winter noon at Santiniketan, unmindful of duties, watching the shadows sweep across the green meadows and blue sky like a gigantic brush. That was a play fit for a lonely child of the Gods or of a listless fairy fashioning phantasies.

And here I find myself in a train compartment proceeding towards Madras. I had brought with me a voluminous book in a blue cover to read. It remains unread. My eyes go wandering out of the window and will not stop. Here they stumble where the terrain is rough, where a group of dark rocks lie huddled in the sun. There a few straggling acacias stand about shaggily. The paddy-fields look like a patchwork quilt with aisles dividing one from the other. The cattle graze lazily. The mango-groves are in blossom. The little black finch with its frisky tail sits on the top of the bamboopole with which to draw water out of the well. A drove of bullock carts, carrying I know not what roll along the village road. They are seen in bold relief against the light violet of a low range of distant hills standing right on the horizon—beyond them all is the faint blue of the sky stretched from end to end.

My mind is content with the thought that I have taken in all that there was to see. The train moves on fast and I cannot go over the once reconnoitered ground. Those who counsel giving up the world because nothing in it lasts, should take lesson from the man in a moving train. Why talk of holding fast to things when every moment we have to give them up? A train-ride brings home to us the fact that what we

momently leave behind becomes a part of us like an experience acquired. In this way our loss becomes our gain. As I look out of the compartment and observe a thing of indescribable beauty on this sunbathed noon of early spring—I realise at the very instant that this will not last, that this will vanish out of my line of vision. And yet, I ask myself, is my present experience an illusion? I am not prepared to accept this to be so. This picture that I see this instant is not a source of joy to me personally—as to an unrelated individual. My response does not depend on my flitting fancy, my individual idiosyncrasy. When the experience is one of joy, it is an experience I share with my brother man as a part of the larger humanity. As an individual person I shall not live everlastingly. I shall have to move and make place for the others who come after me. I shall go, but Man will live. The joy that Kalidasa poured in his verses, on seeing the beauty of the earth bathed in the deep shadows of the early monsoon clouds, will live. It is the joy of every man face to face with Beauty. This cannot vanish or die. Our individual lives are like a passing train speeding through that vale of joy. But the glimpse we have of it is not of the moment but belongs to all times. It is a cumulative joy to which all of us contribute our share, and when I taste of it I enjoy a common heritage....

Written to A....

Translated by Kshitis Roy.

An apology is due from me for my intrusion into the world of pictures and thus offering a perfect instance to the saying that those who do not know that they know not are apt to be rash where angels are timidly careful. I, as an artist, cannot claim any merit for my courage ; for it is the unconscious courage of the unsophisticated, like that of one who walks in dream on a perilous path, who is saved only because he is blind to the risk.

The only training which I had from my young days was the training in rhythm in thought, the rhythm in sound. I had come to know that rhythm gives reality to that which is desultory, which is insignificant in itself. And therefore, when the scratches in my manuscript cried, like sinners, for salvation, and assailed my eyes with the ugliness of their irrelevance, I often took more time in rescuing them into a merciful finality of rhythm than in carrying on what was my obvious task. In the process of this salvage work I came to discover one fact, that in the universe of forms there is a perpetual activity of natural selection in lines, and only the fittest survives which has in itself the fitness of cadence, and I felt that to solve the unemployment problem of the homeless heterogeneous into interrelated balance of fulfilment is creation itself.

My pictures are my versification, in lines. If by chance they are entitled to claim recognition, it must be primarily for some rhythmic significance of form which is ultimate and not for any interpretation of an idea or representation of a fact.

## MY PICTURES (II)

2 July 1930

When, at the age of five, I was compelled to learn and to repeat the lessons from my text-book, I had the notion that literature had its mysterious manifestation on the printed pages, that it represented some supernatural tyranny of an immaculate perfection. Such a despairing feeling of awe was dissipated from my mind when by chance I discovered in my own person that verse-making was not beyond the range of an untrained mind and tottering handwriting. Since then my sole medium of expression has been words, followed at sixteen by music, which also came to me as a surprise.

In the meanwhile the modern art movement, following the line of the oriental tradition, was started by my nephew Abanindranath. I watched his activities with an envious mood of self-diffidence, being thoroughly convinced that my fate had refused me passport across the strict boundaries of letters.

But one thing which is common to all arts is the principle of rhythm which transforms inert materials into living creations. My instinct for it and my training in its use led me to know that lines and colours in art are no carriers of information ; they seek their rhythmic incarnation in pictures. Their ultimate purpose is not to illustrate or to copy some outer fact or inner vision, but to evolve a harmonious wholeness which

finds its passage through our eyesight into imagination. It neither questions our mind for meaning nor burdens it with unmeaningness, for it is, above all, meaning. Desultory lines obstruct the freedom of our vision with the inertia of their irrelevance. They do not move with the great march of all things. They have no justification to exist and therefore they rouse up against them their surroundings; they perpetually disturb peace. For this reason the scattered scratches and corrections in my manuscripts cause me annoyance. They represent regrettable mischance, like a gapingly foolish crowd stuck in a wrong place, undecided as to how or where to move on. But if the spirit of a dance is inspired in the heart of the crowd, the unrelated many would find a perfect unity and be relieved of its hesitation between to be and not to be. I try to make my corrections dance, connect them in a rhythmic relationship and transform accumulation into adornment.

This has been my unconscious training in drawing. I find disinterested pleasure in this work of reclamation, often giving to it more time and care than to my immediate duty in literature that has the sole claim upon my attention, often aspiring to a permanent recognition from the world. It interests me deeply to watch how lines find their life and character, as their connection with each other develops in varied cadences, and how they begin to speak in gesticulations. I can imagine the universe to be a universe of lines which in their movements and combinations pass on their signals of existence along the interminable chain of moments. The rocks and clouds, the trees, the waterfalls, the dance of the fiery orbs, the endless procession of life send up across silent eternity and limitless space a symphony of gestures with which mingles the dumb wail of lines that are widowed gypsies roaming about for a chance union of fulfilment.

In the manuscript of creation there occur erring lines and erasures, solitary incongruities, standing against the world

principle of beauty and balance, carrying perpetual condemnation. They offer problems and therefore material to the *Visvakarma*, the Great Artist, for they are the sinners whose obstreperous individualism has to be modulated into a new variation of universal concord.

And this was my experience with the casualties in my manuscripts, when the vagaries of the ostracized mistakes had their conversion into rhythmic inter-relationship, giving birth to unique forms and characters. Some assumed the temperate exaggeration of a probable animal that had unaccountably missed its chance of existence, some a bird that only can soar in our dreams and find its nest in some hospitable lines that we may offer it in our canvas. Some lines showed anger, some placid benevolence, through some lines ran an essential laughter that refused to apply for its credential to the shape of a mouth which is a mere accident. These lines often expressed passions that were abstract, evolved characters that hung upon subtle suggestions. Though I did not know whether such unclassified apparitions of non-deliberate origin could claim their place in decent art, they gave me intense satisfaction and very often made me neglect my important works. In connection with this came to my mind the analogy of music's declaration of independence. There can be no question that originally melody accompanied words, giving interpretation to the sentiments contained in them. But music threw off this bond of subservience and represented moods abstracted from words, and characters that were indefinite. In fact, this liberated music does not acknowledge that feelings which can be expressed in words are essential for its purpose, though they may have their secondary place in musical structure. This right of independence has given music its greatness, and I suspect that evolution of pictorial and plastic art develops on this line, aiming to be freed from an absolute alliance with natural facts or incidents.



However, I need not formulate any doctrine of art but be contented by simply saying that in my case my pictures did not have their origin in trained discipline, in tradition and deliberate attempt at illustration, but in my instinct for rhythm, my pleasure in harmonious combination of lines and colours.

The world of sound is a tiny bubble in the silence of the infinite. The Universe has its only language of gesture, it talks in the voice of pictures and dance. Every object in this world proclaims in the dumb signal of lines and colours the fact that it is not a mere logical abstraction or a mere thing of use but is unique in itself, it carries the miracle of its existence.

There are countless things which we know but do not recognize their own dignity of truth, independent of the fact that they are injurious or beneficial. It is enough that a flower exists as a flower, but my cigarette has no other claim upon me for its recognition but as being subservient to my smoking habit.

But there are other things which in their dynamic quality of rhythm or character make us insistently acknowledge the fact that they are. In the book of creation they are the sentences that are underlined with coloured pencil and we cannot pass them by. They seem to cry to us, "See, here I am", and our mind bows its head and never questions, "Why are you?"

In a picture the artist creates the language of undoubted reality, and we are satisfied that we see. It may not be the representation of a beautiful woman but that of a commonplace donkey, or of something that has no external credential

of truth in nature but only in its own inner artistic significance.

People often ask me about the meaning of my pictures. I remain silent even as my pictures are. It is for them to express and not to explain. They have nothing ulterior behind their own appearance for the thoughts to explore and words to describe, and if that appearance carries its ultimate worth, then they remain, otherwise they are rejected and forgotten even though they may have some scientific truth or ethical justification.

It is related in the drama of *Shakuntala*, how one busy morning there stood humbly before the maiden of the forest-hermitage a stranger youth who did not give his name. Her soul acknowledged him at once without question. She did know him not but only saw him and for her he was the artist God's masterpiece to which must be offered the full value of love.

Days passed. There came at her gate another guest, a venerable sage who was formidable. And, sure of his claim to a dutiful welcome, proudly he announced, "I am here!" But she missed his voice, for it did not carry with it an inherent meaning, it needed a commentary of household virtue, pious words of sanction which could assign a sacred value to a guest, the value that was not of the irresponsible art, but of moral responsibility.

Love is kindred to art, it is inexplicable. Duty can be measured by the degree of its benefit, utility by the profit and power it may bring, but art by nothing but itself. There are other factors of life which are visitors that come and go. Art is the guest that comes and remains. The others may be important but art is inevitable.

It is absolutely impossible to give a name to my pictures, the reason being that I never make a picture of any pre-conceived subject. Accidentally some form, whose genealogy I am totally unaware of, takes shape out of the tip of my moving pen and stands out as an individual. It is like Sita coming out of the furrows made by King Janaka's plough-share. For him it was easier to give a name to that one accidental factor—the more so when the name had no relation to the actual subject-matter. For me, it is hopeless to try to register the names of the progeny of my pen who come unbidden and in such numbers. I do realise one does not feel happy as long as the *rupa* (form) is not given a *nama* (name).

There is dissatisfaction because the introduction remains incomplete. I suggest, therefore, that those who view my pictures or even buy them, they may please take it upon themselves to name the nameless one and so provide her with the umbrage of baptism. You issue so many appeals for helping the destitute. Why can't you do the same for those who are deprived of a name? It seems highly probable that where you did not expect more than one name, you will be pressed with so many that my pictures might start making a name for themselves. My work is done with the creation

of *rupa* (form), it is for the others to usher in the deluge of *nama* (name).

Written to Ramananda Chatterji  
Translated by Kshitis Roy

When we are able fully to make use of our sense-perceptions, we realise that we exist. This endows every act of our sense-perception with an element of joy which has no direct casual origin — it being part of our joy in existence itself.

Take for instance the act of seeing. We enjoy this act not so much because what we see is beautiful or pleasing, but because the flow of the visible world across our eyes stimulates our sensibility. I remember in my childhood when I was shut up in a room and left all to myself, my lively interest in all that I managed to see through the shuttered windows kept my mind keenly wakeful. The world of pictures is like that — a world seen and enjoyed with the keenest appetite. Our eyes, as much as our minds, recoil from all that fails to attract us, all that is tedious because it lacks diversity. This is similar to our distaste for food which fails to nourish because it does not stimulate appetite.

The secret of true art lies in this: it gives us things to see, things that we cannot help seeing and the seeing of which makes for our joy. From primordial times man has been giving himself things to see. Thus, the mind of man today is stored with the memory of a tremendous diversity of forms and impressions.

If the lines constituting a form are essential because they are inevitable, if they seize the mind because of some distinctive quality inherent in them — irrespective of whether the forms are beautiful or not in their total effect — they claim man's attention or acceptance as extending or rounding off his plane of vision.

We want to see because we love to see things. Out of this desire there is an upsurge of visible objects in their varied forms. They do not carry any philosophical concept, they do not claim to solve any problems of our day-to-day existence, nor do they impart any moral lessons. The only message they have to convey is the fact that they exist and exist indubitably, absolutely. The fact of their existence enkindles in us the awareness that we also exist.

What is a picture? It is that which bears witness to this sense of absolute and perceptible truth of our positive existence. The more categorical its assertion the more unique it is as a statement and better suited for its purpose and fulfilment. All else is irrelevant. If it conveys some message — moral or ethical — it is something over and above, a surplus.

When I had not yet taken to painting, out of this phenomenal world melodies would enter my ears and give rise to feelings and emotions which would make their aural impact on my mind. But when I turned to painting, I at once found my place in the grand cavalcade of the visual world. Trees and plants, men and beasts, everything became vividly real in their own distinct forms. Then lines and colours began revealing to me the spirit of the concrete objects in nature. There was no more need for further elucidation of their *raison d'être* once the artist discovered his role of a beholder — pure and simple. Only the true artist can comprehend the secret of this visible world and the joy of revealing it. Others who seek to read senseless meaning into the pictures, are bound to get lost in a maze of futility.

Most people do not or cannot use their eyes well. They go about their own little business — unobservant and listless. The artist has a call and must answer the challenge to compel the unperceptive majority to share in his joy of the visible, concrete world — directly perceived. He sings not, nor does he moralize. He lets his work speak for itself and its message is: Look, this is what I am, *Ayamaham bho!*

Written to Jamini Roy  
Translated by Kshitiz Roy



For the last fifty years I have been cultivating the art of language. It may be said, therefore, that I have very nearly mastered the technique of words and how they behave. But this art of picture-making with which I have become suddenly possessed, is something with which my acquaintance is rather slight. Its wantonness absorbs all my attention. I think I have the secret of the motive force or the inner principle which impels this unrestraint along certain channels. When some of the artists in Paris told me that I have succeeded in what they have been making efforts to achieve, I did not quite see their meaning. On my asking them to explain what they considered signs of success, they said that this was hardly necessary so long as I continued on my own path. Some time ago, Nandalal discussed my art in an article the meaning of which I was not able fully to grasp. The art of painting eludes me like a shy mistress and moves along subtle ways — unbeknown to me. Her ways are such that I am reminded of what the *Vedas* say: *Ko vedah*. Nobody knows — perhaps not even the Creator. Probably in no other scripture do we come across such a voice of doubt — daring even to assert that the Creator himself does not fully know his own creation. It is the tide of creation itself which bears it along its own current.

As a matter of fact, nobody has the final reply to the ultimate question. We have a better knowledge of literature, relatively. That is because the vehicle of literature is language which again is dependent on meaning. But lines and colours have no voice. Interrogated, they silently point out their finger to the picture itself. 'Look, see for yourself and ask no questions'—they seem to say.

Written to Bisu Mukhopadhyay  
Translated by Kshitis Roy

There is a touch of light-headedness in the air. The artist's mood has become frisky like the lightfooted flurry of sparrows in the grass. He is drunk with the golden wine of the summer noon.

In the vacant courtyard of the deserted house next door, muted memories sob and sigh. The ghost of the other days, buried under the stone floor, wail through the sunlit hours. In the flat land on the other side of the rail-track, dry leaves swish and soar in a sudden whirl, like a wheeze of dusty wind whipped by the blazing sun.

At the end of the hot day rudely rushes in a norwester in a surprise raid. Out of some dim horizon of the mind arises a dust-storm of meaningless melancholy, impelling the artist's brush to trace in bold scars a picture of the world in fever heat.

A while after, the brush loses its tension, its strokes become softer. On this side of the lane, the shuttered world of secrets set up a sudden jingle of jewellery. The torpor of the heated hours breaks with a sudden swiftness, and a roseate glow of romance casts a shadow across the mind.

The artist's fingers dance drunkenly to the suggestion of some voiceless melody. A veiled and invisible murmur mingles with the purple shadows, and out of the deeps of the heart

releases a fountain of colours. Imagination flashes brightly on the dark and limitless space and a rocketburst of emotions throws up a glitter of stars.

In the vast whirlpool of energy, hordes of men rise and fall like fragments of creation. At night, desultory dreams float frothingly on the dark ocean of sleep. By day, vagrant thoughts wander about aimlessly, nowhere — everywhere.

Through all this, the painter's brush moves along — facing obstacles and overcoming them. There is the hindrance of all that is violently ugly, and all that is cloyingly sweet.

Around him swells the muddy and discordant waves of confusion — with their jetsam and flotsam of irrelevance. The artist has to cut his course through all these. He must navigate the frail boat laden with his cargo of songs, safely through the dark waves of the night to the haven of the rising sun. Out of the churning of all the discord and harmony, the artist must make his way in a constant ferment of effort.

Translated by Kshitij Roy from the Bengali poem 'Silpi'



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